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# BEYOND SKIN?

## Diasporic Youth, Television and Cultural Identity

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*Thesis submitted to The Open University/ Sociology*

*for Award of Ph.D*

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*Anita Sharma*

*June 2005*

**Abstract**

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# ABSTRACT

This thesis develops the concept of 'situational belonging' through an exploration of identity construction in young people of the Asian and African-Caribbean diasporas. It challenges contemporary debates that largely focus on the fluid and hybrid aspects of cultural identities. My research highlights the juxtaposition of hybridity alongside degrees of fixity and essentialism in second and third generation young people, living in London. This is illustrated through the ways they negotiate their identities in accordance with 'situations' that they find themselves in.

The concept of 'situational belonging' is a notion of identity that is contingent or context-bound, but accommodates the expression of a need to belong. My contribution to the field is of a notion of identity that vacillates between a vast array of identifications dependent on where, why and with whom interaction may be taking place but always maintains some level of stability.

The findings are drawn from interviews conducted with a small but diverse, multi-ethnic group of young people. By using detailed reflexive analysis in the interpretation of interview material, a number of factors emerge as highly significant in the construction of identities. By focusing

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on some of these areas such as friendship, marriage and religion, this study explores the extent to which ethnic boundaries are constructed, moved or maintained. In addition, analysis of television viewing provides further insight into the extent to which these young people are racialized and ethnicized both as an audience, and in their day-to-day lives. Television is one of the situations within which they construct their identities.

# INTRODUCTION

As a person of the second-generation, born of Indian parents who came to Britain in the 1960s, I am only too aware of the dilemmas surrounding the question of cultural identity. A seemingly simple question such as 'Who am I?' can become extremely problematic to answer, conjuring up a multitude of possibilities, which can depend on the social, political or cultural context in which the question is asked. Structural constraints also determine how far one can or cannot make identity choices. For example, the influence of familial culture and the dominant culture in society, can all impinge on a sense of being and belonging.

Thoughts expressed by the 'British Asian' musician, Nitin Sawhney, on the CD sleeve of his 1999 album *Beyond Skin*, encapsulate some of the key areas of debate with which I wish to engage in my thesis. He reflects on issues of identity and belonging, religion and cultural heritage:

*The BJP in India. The BNP in England. The first would define me by my religious heritage, the latter by the colour of my skin. My identity and my history are defined only by myself – beyond politics, beyond nationality, beyond religion and Beyond Skin (Sawhney 1999).*



Within this statement, Sawhney suggests freedom from external constraints and the ability to make his own identity choices; to transcend visible differences and to go 'beyond skin'. The implication is that although nationality is often defined by a place of birth, and the way one is perceived may be affected by the colour of one's skin, ultimately, one has the freedom to choose a cultural identity and to create a narrative of self and belonging.

What I wish to explore is the extent to which this liberty to make choices might be seen to exist amongst other second and third generation youth in contemporary U.K. Do they see themselves as able to construct their own identities, independent of any constraints, or is that perhaps a privilege only available to cosmopolitan, well-known artists in possession of greater cultural capital? I shall consider both past and contemporary debates surrounding the concepts of 'race' and 'ethnicity', in order to make sense of the scope of agency and the status of structural, contextual constraints in the shaping of racialized and ethnicized identities. In other words, how far do diasporic young people see themselves as shaping their own identity and how far do external forces help mould them?

As suggested in the title of this thesis, I want to query the extent of the perceived relevance of 'race' and 'ethnicity' in the lives of these second and third generation British-born young people. The shifting intellectual theorizations of 'race' need to be considered in relation to the social and

political circumstances in Britain today. Many current debates suggest that 'race' as a definitive marker of social description is an inescapably divisive category that needs to be interrogated and/or dismantled (Miles 1989, 1993; Hall 1987; Gilroy 1998, 1999, 2000). 'Race' therefore, can and should only be perceived as 'real' in terms of its material consequences and discursive effects. In other words, what needs to be considered is how material inequalities and signifying processes combine to racialize groups and therefore, maintain the hegemonic structures of power (Miles 1989). Ideologies and discourses of 'race' are seen here as both constituted by and constitutive of everyday practices in society. 'Ethnicity' closely linked to the concept of 'race', and often used as an alternative, refers to groups of people discursively constructed as sharing norms, values, practices, as seen by themselves and others. Ethnic identity, however, is not theorized as fixed or primordial but culturally fluid, internally contested and politically engaged (Brah 1996; Hall 1999; Yuval-Davis 1999).

One of the key questions being asked in this study is how far do these young people regard themselves as hybrid, incorporating a number of values and cultural practices from both cultures but having no particular essence of either. Or is there a closer link to the one, perhaps based on a respect for a country of origin or diaspora, or as Paul Gilroy (1997) suggests 'a diasporic consciousness' that does not allow them to forget their origins? One of the current assertions in cultural theory that particularly interests me is the suggestion that 'other' cultures are belittled

through the notion of hybridity. It is deemed that 'being hybrid' is the only way in which other cultures get recognition or any kind of status; only when attached to or placed against the dominant culture (Sharma et al 1996; Ratnam 1999; Araeen 2000; Ahmad 2001). To what extent do continuities of long traditions and cultural beliefs impinge on the more fluid, contingent positionings for these young people? Does fluidity exist on the surface but on certain deeper issues, is an essentialist perspective more meaningful?

Most people negotiate their positions in society in relation to the context or situations they find themselves in, but do people of ethnic minority backgrounds, who are often regarded as 'Other' or different, need particular skills? The need to belong, I suggest, plays a major role in their identity formation. I want to explore the emphasis placed on roots and the points at which a realization may occur of their importance in creating a sense of belonging. In other words, what routes bring one closer to one's roots? What are those crucial moments of realization or journeys that are travelled to create that signification?

The reason I have chosen to focus on the category of youth in addressing some of these questions is because this is one of the most formative periods in the life course, during which most people struggle with issues of their identity based on factors such as age, gender, sexuality, 'race' and 'ethnicity'. Although all these areas are crucial in the formation of an



identity, I have primarily focused on generation and 'ethnicity' as organizing categories, and have specifically chosen not to focus on class as part of a structural framework, in such a small sample. My category of youth constitutes a lifestyle category in today's society, where more and more people under the age of 35 are seeking to continue a youth lifestyle, by putting off marriage, mortgages and children till much later.

By looking at two ends of an age spectrum, ranging from 16-21 year old students to people in their late 20s and early 30s, who are in employment but still place themselves within the youth lifestyle, I shall seek to demonstrate the ways in which attitudes towards one's cultural identity change over time. Often as one grows older a stronger cultural consciousness manifests itself, than previously felt or acknowledged. In part, I would associate this strong realisation of roots with a need or desire for belonging, influenced by a status as second or third generation, living in Britain. I maintain that a cyclical process takes place whereby initially there is a move away from the parental beliefs and cultural practices, especially in the teenage years, towards an expression of individuality. In the later twenties and thirties, however, there appears to be a return to one's roots, in part to do with marriage and a need to create a sense of belonging, at this point in the life course.

This research stems from an interest in debates about targeted programming, multiculturalism and young, ethnic minority audiences.



Having worked as researcher on a four-year ESRC project exploring secularization and morality and television (Thompson and Sharma 1997), I became aware of the significance of different genres and the neglected research areas relating to youth and ethnicity, and the vast scope for new studies in this area.

‘Youth TV’ at the time was having its heyday and programmes like *The Word* and *TFI Friday* were constantly being reprimanded by the television watchdogs for being too risqué and distasteful and my initial interest was in exploring this new genre of youth television which was aimed at a new category of youth aged between 16–34. I also wanted to consider whether youth audience is a category that crosses boundaries, bringing together people, irrespective of race and ethnicity, or whether differences do exist. The dimension of television consumption, hooked onto the exploration of youth identities, I feel allows a deeper insight into the understanding of ethnicity and roots in young people. One of my questions is, do young people of different ethnic minority backgrounds watch television differently? This is an important feature of my multi-ethnic sample. By drawing on existing empirical audience research, I have attempted to examine the parameters within which programme selection takes place, looking in particular at the ways in which the viewers negotiate representations of ‘race’. I have applied the insights of existing research to my own research methods in order to build upon existing audience research.

Television is used as an example of popular culture, an influential situation within which the identities of young diasporic people are made and re-made. What are the interpretive strategies used by this audience to read television and how far is this affected by their ethnicity and cultural background? Do other aspects of their identity also affect their viewing choices, for example, in relation to a deeper consciousness based on religious, political, social or individualist conceptions of culture, sometimes influenced by, or comparable with their parental values? I suggest that there may be a reproduction of a 'diaspora consciousness' where the identity is focused on the social dynamics of remembrance and commemoration, defined by a strong sense of the dangers involved in forgetting the location of origin (Gilroy 1997). Another assumption is that the history of marginalization and subordination by the dominant media culture may have created a different and more politically aware audience.

As someone who was born in Britain but fortunate enough to have spent several years in my country of origin, India, I have always been interested in how other second and third generation youth of Asian, African and African Caribbean backgrounds connect with their roots and establish a sense of belonging. I am also keen to explore any differences that may exist between the younger and older members within my youth grouping. Within these two groupings, some are second generation and others are of third generation. The stage in the life course of the interviewees is of particular interest, since preliminary discussions, prior to conducting my

interviews, revealed that people's attitudes change quite dramatically from the start of the youth cycle and the end of it. The move is often from fluid and flexible identities to more fixed, rigid ones, from assimilation towards conscious displays of essentialism. Close ties with the extended families and journeys back to the homeland are some of the major determinants that are seen to assist in the strengthening of roots and belonging.

My in-depth interviews, conducted between 1998 and 2000, with a multi-ethnic sample based on two age groups, are designed to contribute to the debates focusing on the tensions between cultural essentialism, cultural hybridity and assimilation. In order to achieve this, I have devised a continuum with essentialism at one end of the spectrum and assimilation at the other with hybridity in between. The purpose is to explore whether it is possible to plot someone at a particular point on the continuum.

The Thesis is divided into three parts, consisting of six chapters in total, which I shall briefly outline here:

**Part I** consists of three chapters and highlights the theoretical problems of hybridity and fluidity on the one hand and essentialism on the other, giving an insight into the tensions between the two extremes of my continuum.



**Chapter One** explores diasporic youth identities, and is divided into two sections. Within **Section I**, my focus is primarily on constructions of identity and the tensions and relationships between structural constraints and agency and the social and the personal. In this section I draw upon debates about essentialism and anti-essentialism, bringing to the fore a discussion of roots, home and belonging, as manifested in the diasporic racialized and ethnicized identities. All of these debates pertaining to cultural identity formation provide a basis on which to explore my concept of 'situational belonging' in relation to my sample.

**Section II** reviews literature within the fields of youth identity, 'ethnicity' and the media, to gain a further understanding of the ways in which second and third generation youth construct their identities and 'situate' themselves. The main focus here is to establish the extent to which they embrace hybridity or a sense of roots and belonging, and the difficulties that exist in categorizing or making generalizations about any group of young people, and the motivation behind their identity constructions.

I highlight recent debates that critique multiculturalism and cultural hybridity, particularly focusing on those that suggest that these concepts merely reinforce the 'otherness' of minority cultures, and that without hybridization these cultures are not important, in their own right. Cultural pluralism is promoted as the way forward in that it gives each culture

equal standing, with no lesser cultures; equal but different (Friedman 1997; Sharma et al 1996; Araeen 2000; Ahmad 2001).

Within Chapter Two, the relationship between ethnic minorities, television, and multiculturalism is explored. Television is used illustratively, as a 'situation' in relation to the ways in which ethnic minority young people rationalise and forge their identities. It is a context in which 'situational belonging' is formulated and configured.

'Race' representation on British television is examined in the chapter, particularly focusing on the last two decades of the twentieth century, and the effectiveness of past multicultural programming and its continuing relevance in twenty-first century Britain.

Within Chapter Three I explain my choice of methods and methodology, highlighting the problems and dilemmas that eventually led to my selection of the semi-structured interview technique and use of reflexive analysis in studying my multi-ethnic sample. The tensions between qualitative and quantitative, positivist and interpretivist methods are highlighted in order to explain my particular choices.

Part II incorporates the main body of analysis in the thesis, contained within Chapters Four and Five. The two chapters are based on the interviews conducted between 1998 and 2000, with a mixed ethnic group of young Londoners from Asian, African and African Caribbean

backgrounds. The importance of the role of ethnicity and the concept of 'situational belonging' in the identity construction of the interviewees are developed within the chapters.

**Chapter Four** introduces the analysis by considering the ways in which these young people engage with television representations and portrayals of 'cultural otherness' on the small screen. As a cultural medium with the power to influence both the public and private spheres of our lives, television is a useful context for illustrating the formation of identities and cultural values.

**Chapter Five** examines the construction of identities and the negotiation of roots and belonging in their lives. Identity is explored by bringing together a number of 'situations' identified from the interview data, for example, family, friends, age, religion, gender, collective belonging. The chapter highlights the contradictory nature of identity formation, often ranging between fixedness and fluidity, essentialism and assimilation.

The findings of this research are summarised within **Part III** of the thesis, **Chapter Six**, which forms the **Conclusion**. This draws together theoretical discussions and my findings in order to make a contribution to the understanding of diasporic youth identities. My main emphasis lies in summing up the concept of 'situational belonging' and showing how second and third generation identities are not necessarily hybrid, but more fluid and 'situational' in accordance with the situation or context, and

always with some degree of stability or 'situatedness,' attributed to a need to belong.

# **PART I**

## **DEBATING 'RACE' AND 'ETHNICITY' IN IDENTITY AND TELEVISION**



## **Chapter One**

### **SITUATING DIASPORIC IDENTITIES**

**My research explores the formulation of identities in second and third generation young people of the African, Caribbean and Asian diasporas. This requires gaining a deeper understanding of the sociology of the concept of ‘race’ and the debates surrounding ‘ethnicized’ and ‘racialized’ identities and their interrelationship with other bases of social identity. First and foremost, however, ‘identity’ as a concept needs to be examined on many levels, considering both, individual or self-identities versus group or collective ones, as well as externally imposed or categorical identities. This will show the extent to which identity is constructed unintentionally, by constraint or choice, and allows me to introduce and explore my own concepts of ‘situational’ and ‘situated belonging’ in relation to my sample of young diasporics.**

**The chapter will be divided into Sections I and II – Section I consisting of a number of sub-sections, which will discuss key concepts and theoretical debates relevant to my research questions; Section II will review the status of youth identities in relation to research into youth identities and ethnicity, and seek to problematize the concept of ‘hybridity’ in diasporic identities.**

## Section I: Theory

### Constructions of Identity

I would like to explore identity at a personal level – identity as being about creating an account of oneself; the autonomy of the ‘self’ as agent, able to create stories and narratives about oneself; human beings characterized by ‘agency’ who can behave independently of the constraints of society (Giddens 1991). And to establish the extent to which individuals are, as Anthony Giddens suggests, ‘knowledgeable agents’ who can construct perceptions of the social world in which they are located, and are able to articulate what they do and the reasons for doing them (Giddens 1984).

The reality surrounding the construction of an identity is not as straightforward as simply pinning on a selection of badges of choice, because there are a number of external factors that influence and govern our lives and decisions. Individuals as ‘agents’ may seek to act autonomously with the ability to exercise ‘free will’, however there are constraints in society that affect their choices. ‘Structure’ or systems of social institutions work in conjunction with ‘agency’ to create a complex system of interplay, whereby individuals create society but are also simultaneously created by it. A multiplicity of sources such as ethnicity, class, gender, race and sexuality may create conflicts in the construction of identity positions in society. The concept

of identity, therefore, cannot be looked at in isolation - only in relation to 'self' or on a personal level, because its construction is moulded around our relationships with others and the social world we inhabit. Identity is aptly defined as the interface between subjective positions and social and cultural situations (Woodward 1997). 'Identity is about belonging, about what you have in common with some people and what differentiates you from others. At its most basic it gives you a sense of personal location, the stable core to your individuality. But it is also about social relationships, your complex involvement with others' (Weeks 1990: 88). As suggested here, personal identity cannot be disentangled from its social manifestation and influences. Our subjectivity, which involves our personal feelings and thoughts and constitutes our sense of 'who we are', is always experienced in a social context, affected by the language and culture around us.

To understand the complexities surrounding the conceptualization of identity, it is important to break it down into its different dimensions: the 'symbolic' dimension that uses markings to help identify a group allegiance viz. particular clothes, religious practices, flags etc, and on which the 'social' and material dimension is based. Although the 'social' and 'symbolic' refer to two different processes, each is needed to mark and maintain identities: the 'symbolic' is how sense is made of social relations and practices e.g. who is included or excluded; and 'social differentiation' determines how these differences are 'lived out' in social relations. The 'psychic' level is another dimension, which helps understand why people take up certain positions and



identify with them. In order to understand identity on a more unconscious level, it is also important to acknowledge Jacques Lacan's reworking of Freudian theories, by focusing on the symbolic in the development of identity and subjectivity. Lacan (1977) sees the unified human subject as a myth, and maintains that a child's sense of identity only really arises from the internalization of outer views of itself. The infant gets a sense of 'I' only through finding the 'I' reflected back by something outside of itself, by the 'other' and from the place of the 'other'; although it maintains that the sense of self comes from within itself. This focus on the unconscious adds a further dimension to the concept of identity.

Another theory that informs my interpretation of identity is that of 'symbolic interactionism' - the notion of a creative consciously acting self, not based on accounts of behaviour based on instinct or an in-built characteristic, but one in which selfhood is learnt through the responses of others; the notion of 'the looking glass self' (Cooley 1922). We come to know 'who we are' and 'what we should do' through the response of others to our actions - later developed by George Herbert Mead (1934) into the concept of the 'I' and the 'Me'. Mead stressed how our self has to develop in a social context through socialization. 'Self' is a social construction but society is constantly remade by the actions of the social selves. Society therefore can be seen as interconnected interactions between people based on individuals' perceptions and expectations of each other. Both self and society therefore remain fluid and adaptable. Identities are ever-changing depending on the social contexts within which we

experience them, and in the symbolic systems through which we make sense of our own positions. In that sense, identity depends on 'difference' since the marking of differences is crucial to the construction of identity positions.

Racial, sexual, class, generational and gender differences, alongside binary oppositions and dichotomies of 'them' and 'us' create classificatory systems that in turn give rise to cultures and cultural differences. Cultures have their own ways of classifying the world, shared meaning-systems, which distinguish them from others.

Studying identities, for example, those of young people of ethnic minority' backgrounds, reveals contradictions and ambiguity surrounding their formation. The fragility and instability of identities, particularly becomes evident, when taking into account the forces, both internal and external, that influence them – individual beliefs, collective cultures and institutions, historical periods and locales. There are both choices and constraints on one's identity, and when considering ethnic and racial identities, it becomes apparent that they are constrained by the discourse of 'race' and racism in societies. It is vital to realise that these identities are produced through a negotiation between those identities chosen by the individuals and those that other people ascribe to them. The terms 'racialized', 'racialization', 'ethnicized' and 'ethnicization' emphasise the social and psychological processes involved in putting individuals and groups into 'racial' or 'ethnic' categories, derived from Franz Fanon (1988) and used by many other sociologists like Robert Miles (1989) to highlight the dynamic processes that

are in play. The concepts of 'ethnicity' and 'race' mark differences between people on the basis of assumptions about human physical or cultural variations and the meanings of these variations, creating their ethnicization or racialization (Lewis and Phoenix, 2004). I shall therefore, discuss 'race' and racial identities in much more detail, later in this chapter.

Firstly, I would like to look at two different ways of considering 'cultural identities', as described by cultural theorist, Stuart Hall (1989). The first position states that cultural identities are seen to reflect common historical experiences and shared cultural codes, which create 'one people', with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference. This 'oneness' is seen as the truth or 'essence' of one's identity. The second position recognises that there are points of deep and significant 'differences' alongside the points of similarity; that we cannot speak with any exactness about 'one experience, one identity' without acknowledging ruptures and discontinuities that occur. The key point that Hall makes here is that 'cultural identities come from somewhere, and have histories. But, like everything, which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to the continuous "play" of history, culture and power' (Hall 1989: 212-213). Cultural identity, in this sense is a matter of 'becoming' as well as 'being'. 'Identities are therefore, the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past' (ibid: 213). What Hall propounds is cultural identity is not a fixed essence; it is not 'once-and-for-all', it is not a fixed origin to which we can



make some final and absolute Return. Although it has histories, which have real, material and symbolic effects, it is vital to see cultural identity, not as an essence, but a positioning (ibid: 213). Debates about essentialism and anti-essentialism lie at the heart of any discussions of identity, and here a key proponent of the fluidity of identities emphasizes the problems associated with biological or trans-historical origin or truths.

As stated earlier, I have chosen to focus more particularly on 'individual' identities, however, this inevitably has to include discussion of 'collective' identities and the ways in which people belong to groups or collectives. A 'collective identity' incorporates notions of 'sameness' or a fixed status often politically motivated whereas 'individual identity', on the other hand, is seen as fluid, contingent and always being negotiated, with the emphasis therefore located in 'difference'. As Kathryn Woodward suggests 'identity necessarily involves the interrelationship between the 'inside' and the 'outside', the 'personal' and the 'social' – 'what I feel inside and what is known about me outside'. It is through the internalisation of social and cultural meanings that individuals are able to occupy their identities and match up the 'subjective' feelings they bring, to the objective places they inhabit' (2002: 21). What I am seeking to identify are the ways in which my sample of young people negotiate their life stories and create narratives for themselves and others, often influenced by their status as second and third generation ethnic minorities in Britain.

The production of identities through narratives is a significant process in people's lives. We not only tell others stories about ourselves, but also use them to make sense of ourselves. It is a way of exploring our identities, and is one that continues throughout our lives. Our narratives constantly change in relation to the context and circumstances surrounding us, however, along with fluidity there is always a desire for something constant; some continuity. Stories are seen to provide coherence: 'We are in the middle of our stories and cannot be sure how they will end; we are constantly having to revise the plot as new events are added to our lives. Self then, is not a static thing or a substance, but a configuration of personal events into a historical unity which includes not only what one has been but also anticipations of what one will be' (Polkinghorne 1988:150). Similarly, it is maintained that that 'if we have a unified identity from birth to death, it is only because we construct a comforting story or 'narrative of the self' about ourselves. A fully unified, completed, secure and coherent identity is seen as a fantasy. Instead as the systems of meaning and cultural representations multiply, we are confronted by a bewildering, fleeting multiplicity of possible identities, any of which we could identify with – at least temporarily' (Hall, 1992:277).

One of my research questions is to consider whether youth of the diaspora go through a cyclical process whereby they take different 'routes' to explore their cultural 'roots,' arriving back almost at where they started, often dependent on their age and experiences. In other words, do they move from a fixed collective identity, to an exploration of individuality and difference and then



back to an interpretation of that initial collectivity, that embodies a stronger 'diaspora consciousness' (Gilroy, 1997) than has been recognised? Do they simply shift from a more hybrid, assimilationist way of thinking towards a greater belief in roots and essentialism as they grow older? James Clifford (1992) puts forward the interesting proposition that in order to focus on hybrid, cosmopolitan experiences as much as on rooted, native ones, we must rethink culture and anthropology in terms of 'travel'. So instead of seeing 'culture' as an organic growth of a particular place, the motif of travel will incorporate the movement experienced by peoples from their places of origin. He shifts the concept of culture away from 'roots' towards 'routes', endowing it with a more flexible way of dealing with the many different kinds of 'floating lives' that exist today (1992: 101,108). 'Routes' are described as more dynamic, allowing change and mobility, steps in the forward direction; 'roots', on the other hand, are seen as involved with the past and with myths of origin.

Cultural theorist, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1990) shows scepticism towards the search for roots, maintaining that everyone has them, and therefore there is no need to seek them out. Yet she also realises that often seeking for roots is a strategy or tactic, used as a response to the crisis of being excluded or marginalized. Her argument is that rather than placing importance in roots, there is a need to construct counter narratives that allow the 'subaltern to speak' (1990:93). One of the main criticisms of roots is the notion of essentialism with which it is associated. 'Essentialism' is seen to

imply fixity and an unwillingness to change, giving rise to binary oppositions such as 'them' and 'us', 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. This dualistic approach is seen as allowing no scope for a middle ground for managing difference, or allowing ambiguity or ambivalence. On the other hand, essentialism can, and often is, used strategically by dominated and marginalized groups, who use their bonds of cultural experience in order to take action and be represented. Spivak states that 'strategically one can look at essentialisms, not as descriptions of the way things are, but as something that one must adopt to produce a critique of anything' (ibid: 51). The whole notion of rootedness in a specific historical past is today looked upon in a negative way, since this approach is seen to give rise to the risk of 'Otherness' and exclusion.

Recent definitions of identity have presented strong arguments for the more assimilationist concepts of hybridity and contingency of identity e.g Hall (1987; 1989); Bhabha (1994), Gilroy (1997). Hybrid social forms are seen as the result of interculturality or the transgressing of cultural boundaries. This notion of the black experience as a diaspora experience or 'cultural diasporization' is seen to mark the end of old ethnicities and the formation of transgressive cultural formations which, in and of themselves, function to dispel the certainties of fixed location (Hall 1987). What Paul Gilroy (1993) terms the 'the Black Atlantic' – a cultural network spanning Africa, the Americas, the Caribbean and Britain, is seen to have acted as a source of strength and continuity for people of African descent throughout the world. Whereas the 'multiculturalism' of old is seen to have simply recognized

difference, 'hybridity' is credited with the qualities of cultural pluralism, in that it is seen as a clear move away from essentialist notions of culture, from roots and a fixed place of origin. These debates in turn have created theories surrounding diaspora and diasporization of identities, which are best understood within the debates of mass migration and globalisation of cultural influences. The mass media, travel and the Internet, are seen to have given rise to a 'cosmopolitanism' that has moved away from 'race' and all its implications, into another dimension. This focus informs my thesis, but also poses problems in terms of the notion of belonging, when researching identities of diasporic youth. Later on, within this chapter, I shall explore the positive and problematic aspects of cultural hybridity within the current literature and critiques.

In order to make some sense of the identities of young people of the African, African Caribbean and Asian diasporas, there is a primary need to consider 'race' and the racialization of identities. The discourses of race are numerous and constantly being reconsidered, for example, the move away from biological determinism, to racism as an ideology, towards anti-essentialism and the politicization of race. 'Ethnicity' as a concept has become more fashionable, a more politically correct way of writing about 'race', a way of identifying a group according to religion, culture, language and possibly phenotypical characteristics. In many senses constructions of 'race' and 'ethnicity' are inseparable since the processes of 'racialization' and 'ethnicization' are linked to the ideology of racism and establishing cultural



difference. For example, how do 'ethnic minority' youth born and raised in London, who are visibly, and in some senses culturally different, create their identities and a sense of belonging? One approach to identity is that 'identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis, when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable is displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty', as in the discourses of race and ethnicity in Britain, there is often expressed, a sense of dislocation in a post-colonial setting (Mercer 1994: 259).

When using the term 'ethnic minority' I use it in its official sense as relating to 'all sub-groups of the population not indigenous to the United Kingdom who hold cultural traditions and values derived, at least in part, from their countries of origin' (Department of Health and Social Services Inspectorate, 1998). My definition of 'ethnic minorities' is used in much the same way as those of Bhikhu Parekh (1991) and Tariq Modood et al (1994), who are aware of the term's limitations but see the need for a comprehensible term for ethnic communities in the United Kingdom: 'The Asian and Afro-Caribbean communities are ethnic in nature, that is, physically distinguishable, bonded by social ties arising out of shared customs, language and the practice of inter-marriage, and having their distinct history, collective memories, geographical origins, views of life and modes of social organization' (Parekh 1991). Parekh does however, acknowledge that even within the same family changes are afoot, with members re-negotiating and re-defining their patterns of relationships in relation to traditional values and those of their adopted country. There is therefore a problem with the extent of homogeneous

definitions of ethnic groupings due to cross-cultural intermixings that are taking place. Modood et al. (1994) suggest that 'ethnic minority identities' are a product of distinctive cultural practice, a product of how minorities believe themselves to be treated by the majority. They suggest that some re-define themselves in terms of their oppression and others have a more heightened sense of their 'mode of being' as a result of having to draw upon that aspect of their 'ethnicity' which gives them most pride and solidarity in the face of majority contempt (1994:7).

Within the remainder of Section I, which focuses overall on identity, some of the key concepts and theoretical debates surrounding race and ethnicity and identity will be considered, which will be drawn upon within the body of my thesis, particularly in the analysis of the interviews with diasporic youth.

## **Race and Racialized Identities**

However much political leaders and liberals would like to believe that race no longer matters, or that society has moved 'beyond race', there still remain a number of ingrained ideologies contained within the concept of 'race' that can often predetermine a person's place in society. Hybridity and cosmopolitanism in an ever-shrinking world may seem to suggest otherwise, however, everyday realities suggest that 'race' as a concept of 'difference' and

racism as a means of oppression and cultural imperialism still continues.

'Race' is a system of power that often draws on physical differences to construct and give meaning to racial boundaries, and the hierarchy of which they are a part. It therefore, forms an important part of the context against which individuals negotiate their affiliations and understanding of themselves.

In order to understand the prevalence of racial markers or 'racialization', it is important to consider some of the history behind the concept of 'race' and all its subsequent manifestations. In Europe, racial divisions are seen to have emerged out of a colonial past. Corporeality is central to the development of racial discourses, and is constructed as reflecting signs of inferiority or superiority. Many racial hierarchies, that still exist, came in to being in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with the help of western science, which classified and ranked people of the world into superior and inferior races, at higher or lower points on the evolutionary scale (Gould 1984). In recent years, however, the move has been away from the biological determinism associated with the concept of 'race', and a greater emphasis is placed on 'racism' as an ideology and the concept of 'racialization' or the process of making or becoming racial in outlook.

There is a vast literature surrounding the subject of 'race' and racism, and the general consensus is one that rejects 'race' as an idea and maintains that the ideology of racism is the most important factor for understanding the effects



of racism in society. Miles (1989) argues that 'races' are socially imagined rather than biological realities – a social construction of reality; and the concept of 'racialization' is seen as a racist ideology in which all inter-group differences are racialized. He suggests that racial categorization is a process of racialization: 'I therefore employ the concept of racialization to refer to those instances where social relations between people have been structured by the signification of human and biological characteristics in such a way as to define and construct differentiated social collectivities. The concept, therefore, refers to a process of categorization; a representational process of defining an Other (usually, but not exclusively) somatically' (Miles 1989: 75). Michael Banton (1997) is similarly critical of the usage of the term by sociologists, stating that they take the easy option of talking about 'racialization' so they do not have to further discuss the validity of those racial theories – namely, to work with prevailing racial theories without entering into any debate about their validity.

My own particular intention when discussing race is to be reflexive, asking questions about why some social divisions are racialized, and how and why racial classifications are used to label or include or exclude social groups. My usage of quotation marks/scare quotes around 'race' on occasions seeks to explore or emphasize the contentious nature of the concept. 'Race' itself, within this thesis is understood to be socially and politically constructed and therefore understood only in relation to their particular historical and political contexts. Although on occasions, I seek to make distinctions between 'race'

and 'ethnicity', this is problematic since within both discourses there is a system of interplay between the social/cultural and the biological registers that allows differences in one signifying system to be read off against equivalents in the other chain (Hall 1989). It is also important to realise that the semantics surrounding both these concepts are constantly undergoing change and therefore the construction of 'race' and 'ethnicity' is subject to frequent alteration and interpretation. Within my analysis these constructions are utilised in accordance with my interviewees' commonsense or perceived notions of 'race' or 'ethnicity', often based on how they position themselves in accordance with how others position them. In a sense, the ambiguities that exist between everyday and academic racial classifications are highlighted.

'Being Black' or blackness occupies a key place in the politicization and ethnicization of race. In the latter half of the twentieth century, many of those people who experienced prejudice, based on their 'race' or somatic characteristics, have united to bring about political change. In the United States in the 1960s, the Black Power Movement politically mobilized the African-American population and sought to invert the negativity associated with being Black, with slogans such as 'Black is Beautiful'. In Britain in the 1970s, 'black' became a banner under which many people of different ethnic backgrounds united to gain political strength. The discourse of race therefore came to be recognized as a discourse of resistance. In more recent times however, the umbrella grouping of 'Black' has come under fire for not being representative of South Asian groups and other non-white groupings, for



whom the specificities of racism are often different. Subsequently, clear distinctions are drawn between Africans, African-Caribbeans and Asians in Britain, although these too, are contested as undermining the heterogeneity within these ethnic groupings.

When explaining the formation of contemporary ethnic and racialized identities, one needs to acknowledge that there has been a shift from 'identity politics' to the new politics of 'cultural difference'. This shift from one to the other is seen to emphasise the tensions between what are commonly referred to as 'essentialist' and 'anti-essentialist accounts' (Mac an Ghaill, 1999). One of the key contributions to the debates around blackness and 'the black subject' is Hall's suggestion of 'the end of the innocent notion of the essential black subject', and the need to acknowledge the huge diversity of subjective experiences, social experiences and cultural identities, which compose the category of 'black'. He states that one must realize that "black" is essentially a politically and culturally constructed category which cannot be grounded in a set of fixed transcultural or transcendental racial categories and which therefore has no guarantees in Nature (Hall 1987: 166). He states that 'the essentializing moment is weak because it naturalizes and dehistoricizes difference, mistaking what is historical and cultural for what is natural, biological and genetic' (Hall, 1992: 472). Here the emphasis rests on individual identity over shared identity and the notions of cultural essence; to essentialize is to fall prey to a form of racism or self-racialization.

Hall suggests that 'We are seen as always being in negotiation, not with a single set of oppositions that place us always in the same relation to others but with a series of different positionalities. Each has its own point of profound subjective identification. The black experience is seen as a diasporic one but it is maintained that there can be no return to the ancestral roots per se but a hybridisation of traditional forms, transformed by the technologies and identities of the present' (1992b: 473). I find this interpretation useful for explaining my notions of 'situated' and 'situational' belonging; the notion that cultural identities are points of identification, which are made within discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a positioning (Hall 1989: 213). This contingency within identity is the very aspect that I examine within 'situational belonging'.

The most recent, and in some senses most controversial, approach to race is one that seeks to deny its existence. Gilroy (2000) in his dual-titled book - *Against Race* (in the U.S.) and *Between Camps* (in the U.K.) reflects the different positions taken on race in the two countries. The former title tilts towards the suggestion that race is not real, and that racism is a thing of the past. This is an approach that fits in with the growing list of African-American academic literature that pushes forward the notion of colour-blindness. The latter title refers to 'camp-thinking' or group-based identities that lead to exclusionary politics. Gilroy explores how camp thinking gave form and meaning to racisms associated with anti-semitism and fascism and exploitative racisms of African and Asian colonialism. His solution lies in the movement of people

across nation states thereby liberating them from making connections between land, kinship and solidarity; of having diasporic identities. What Gilroy suggests that people are capable and willing to forget about existing cultural hierarchies, racialized discourse and hegemonic practices and simply able to live as diasporic peoples, without any links to roots, traditions and ethnicities.

When looking at identities in second and third generation youth of Asian and Black diasporas, my research seeks to examine how relevant the concept of 'race' and racism is in their lives in Britain. What are their definitions of 'race', and how does their everyday discourse of race differ from or concur with theoretical discourses surrounding the concept? How does it affect the way they create a sense of identity and belonging? Does their ethnicity automatically become racialized, and is this self-imposed, or imposed by other influences in society? Or do they simply see themselves as 'beyond race'?

### **Ethnicity and Ethnicized Identity**

In recent years the term 'race and ethnicity' has been employed in discussions as though the concepts are synonymous with each other. They are similar as far as they are ideological entities or discursive formations, signalling a language through which differences are accorded social significance.



Together, however, race and ethnicity can be conceived most usefully as social and political resources, that are used by both dominant and subordinate groups for the purposes of legitimizing and furthering their own social identities and interests (Bulmer and Solomos 1998). The way I choose to look at both these concepts is in relation to identity and their intrinsic roles in the formation of collective social identities and individual identities. I do, however, feel that they need to be identified as two separate concepts and I shall in this section attempt to draw out differences that exist between 'race' and 'ethnicity'.

Like 'race', 'ethnicity' is subject to a number of different interpretations. For many the word has come to replace 'race', as a more respectable term to describe ethnic groups or ethnic minorities. 'Ethnicity' also serves as a term for a variety of social features such as language, religion, customs of dress or food, folklore and/or general groupings by country or regional heritage. It has also become a euphemism for 'culture'. Modood et al (1997:13) state that 'an ethnic group would be defined as a community whose heritage offers important characteristics in common between its members, and which makes them distinct from other communities. There is a boundary that separates 'us' from 'them' and the distinction would probably be recognized on both sides of that boundary. 'Ethnicity' is defined as a multi-faceted phenomenon based on physical appearance, subjective identification, cultural and religious affiliation, stereotyping and social exclusion. But it is not possible to prescribe in advance what the key distinguishing characteristics might be; the



components of ethnicity will be different in Britain, compared with, say, within Northern Ireland, Belgium, Bosnia, the United States, Rwanda, India, or Singapore. So it is necessary to adopt a flexible and practical approach to choosing the specific criteria to identify the important ethnic boundaries in any particular society.'

One of the criticisms of the above definition is the use of the words 'physical appearance' which has been interpreted as creating a racialized concept of ethnicity. Another involves the concept of 'ethnic group' and the suggestion of homogeneity within one particular group (Smith 2002). With relation to my research, I follow the assumption that some people may choose to define themselves in terms of 'ethnicized' or 'racialized' identities based on their experiences of racism and racialization. I am in agreement with Modood et al, when they state that a focus on 'colour' is contingent and specific to our context (namely, British), but not essential to any theory of what makes a group of people of an ethnic group (Modood, T., Berthoud, R & Nazroo, J 2002). They also make the point that a group cannot be called an 'ethnic group' unless it includes some sense of collective subjectivity; some sense of the existence of a group and sense of identification, but recognize that this is not reducible to choices but discrete individuals.

When deconstructing the concept of ethnicity, 'ethnicity' has been described as a continuum or spectrum, varying widely in terms of salience, intensity and meaning (Pieterse 1997). The extremes of views on the continuum in the

debate on ethnicity are primordialism and instrumentalism. 'Primordialism' is the contentious essentialist view of ethnicity in which ethnic groups are taken as given, determined by some deep cultural, psychological or even, biological human quality. 'Instrumentalism' interprets ethnicity as a purely political phenomenon – ethnic platforms use selected customs as emblems to legitimize ethnic claims in the public domain, or manipulation of collective identities by some agents, takes place in order to achieve power or enforce social discipline. In such cases the agents are referred to, negatively, as 'ethnic entrepreneurs' who trade in the commerce of identity, in other words, ethnic mythologies are processed into concrete definitions and sold in the political marketplace as an identity to which economic and political interests can be ascribed (Tilley 1997: 507).

'Ethnicity' is often seen to be imposed through labelling and legislation from above; in other words, ethnic identity may not derive from 'roots' but from politics of subordination and the process of 'Othering' on the part of a dominant group. It is maintained that in the West, most countries have had stability in terms of ethnic relations, with ethnicity occupying a marginal, often decorative status on the periphery of a stable institutional and cultural mainstream (Pieterse 1997: 372). In more recent years with the growth of multiculturalism, it has been argued that 'decolonisation of ethnicity' has taken place leading to the 'renegotiation of hegemony' (ibid: 373). This approach to ethnicity is useful in relation to my sample of ethnic minority youth who are British-born and raised. One assumption that one could make

about second and third generation young people is that to a large extent they have managed successfully to 'commodify their Otherness' (hooks 1992). bell hooks writes that 'within commodity culture, ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture' (1992: 21). Through cleverly situating themselves, according to context and circumstances, and embracing an identity that encompasses both ethnic difference and sameness, there is a disharmonization of hegemony and freedom within. Nazli Kibria (2000) suggests that it may be useful to conceptualise 'race' as an ethnic cue - the marker of race shaping individual negotiations of ethnic identity during informal social encounters; an involuntary sign over which an individual has little or no control giving off information to others about various aspects of their ethnic identity. In other words, race is seen to shape the production of ethnic identities, namely being 'Black' or 'Asian' is seen as more relevant than being from Hong Kong, Jamaica or Bangladesh, or being a Muslim or Hindu; the 'visible difference' making more of an impact than 'cultural difference'.

What I consider to lie at the heart of debates around ethnicity is Fredrik Barth's (1969) conceptualization of boundary maintenance. He describes ethnic groups as categories of self-identification as well as ascribed by others. He focuses on the social processes by which ethnic groups emphasize themselves as distinctive identities and maintain boundaries with others. These ethnic boundaries are constructed and maintained around a range of signifiers articulated in varying combinations under specific situations. Barth



maintains that ethnicity is less to do with primordial cultural differences and all to do with constructing ethnic distinctiveness – an aspect that I wish to further explore.

Within the next sub-section I look at the current debates surrounding ‘cultural hybridity’ – the challenge it presents to static and essentialist notions of ethnicity, and a critique of hybridity as a concept.

### **Hybridity, Multiculturalism and Cultural Pluralism**

Defining ‘hybridity’ in its own right is highly problematic however, juxtaposed alongside theories of essentialism and bounded cultures, it acquires validity. Discourses surrounding transgression, multiple belonging, interculturality and cultural syncretism are often associated with the concept of hybridity. The multiplicities and ambivalence contained in this construction of social order contrast with essentializing discourses that stress the maintenance of boundaries, ethnicity, racism and xenophobia. This postmodernist, postcolonial theory of hybridity is seen to challenge social order and cultural identities.

Distinctions are also drawn between types of hybridity - unconscious ‘organic’ hybridity and conscious, ‘intentional’ hybridity, pointing out that



despite the illusion of rounded cultures, they are all constantly evolving historically – there is no culture in or of itself (Werbner 1997). ‘Organic’ hybridisation is seen to maintain the sense of order and continuity, whereby new words, images, objects, are integrated into language or culture unconsciously. This organic hybridity is seen to lay the foundations on which aesthetic hybrids or other more conscious intentional hybridity occurs. This distinction, which Pnina Werbner derives from Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1981) work on language, is useful in theorizing the simultaneous coexistence of both cultural change and resistance to change, in ethnic or migrant groups and nation states. Werbner maintains that ‘intentional’ hybrids create an ironic double consciousness – a collision between differing points of view on the world – ‘what is felt to be most threatening is the deliberate, provocative aesthetic challenge to an implicit social order and identity’ (1997:5).

Three key advocates of hybridity, as mentioned earlier, are Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy and Homi Bhabha, who consider hybridization as a solution to anti-ethnic or nationalist agenda. Hall (1987) links hybridity in with ‘the end of the innocent notion of the essential black subject’ and the concept of ‘new ethnicities’, which provide non-static and non-essentialist approaches to ethnic culture. He calls for recognition of the fact that black/ethnic identities, consist of a diversity of subjective positions, social experiences and cultural identities’ and therefore should not be essentialized into the homogeneous grouping (1987; 1992b). Gilroy’s (1993) thesis of ‘the Black Atlantic’ is seen to provide a counter-culture to the Afrocentric essentialist notion of blackness. It

provides a hybrid, continuously changing cultural domain within which peoples of the black diaspora can unite, in a contingent unity. Gilroy purports that 'diaspora' provides the perfect environment for anti-essentialism and true cosmopolitanism. The transgression of national or ethnic borders is key to Bhabha's (1994) condition of hybridity, allowing individuals to speak from two places at once, without inhabiting either; the creation of 'double consciousness' between the center and margins. This space of 'liminality' or inter-space, he suggests, produces a counter-narrative where the politics of polarity have no place, emerging in moments of historical transformation as a 'Third Space', or a new location of resistance to essentialist identities and associated political demands. It is seen as a product of 'cultural translation' in which the hybrid subject negotiates cultural difference in an inter-play between 'home' and 'host' (Bhabha, 1994).

The paradoxical nature of hybridity has led to a variety of questions being raised around the concept. One of the crucial points made is that hybridity is a more conscious and deliberate creation, which has become a reflexive moral battleground between cultural purists and cultural innovators (Werbner 1997). Werbner draws on the theory of 'cosmopolitans' and 'transnationals', distinctions used by Ulf Hannerz (1992), in his work on globalizing cultural complexity. 'Cosmopolitans' are described as travelling amongst global cultures and savouring cultural differences; moving with ease between social worlds. 'Transnationals' by contrast, move in swarms to create collective homes wherever they choose to locate themselves. Like cosmopolitans, they

are cultural hybrids, but their hybridity is more unconscious and collectively negotiated. They think globally but their loyalties lie in translocal social networks and cultural diasporas. They are actively seen to construct communities to shield them from racism, and boundaries to prevent deliberate external transgressive hybridity (Modood 1997; Baumann 1996).

One critique of this intellectualizing of hybridity is that hybridity in itself is meaningless as a description of culture, because it 'museumizes' culture as a thing. The hybridity discourse celebrated by these diasporic intellectuals is seen as merely a form of self-congratulation – since culture as an analytic concept is always hybrid (Friedman 1997). Jonathan Friedman also asserts that they speak for a special class of cosmopolitans who have a positioned interest in perpetuating notions of hybridity without modernism. Werbner's contention is that one of the key dangers we need to guard against is of essentializing all essentialisms as the same; of one that ends up criminalizing ethnicity and exonerating racism. Other critics suggest that too much hybridity can lead to crucial social problems of class and racial oppression being left unresolved; those contradictions and struggles that existed before hybridity-talk still need attention – for example, imperialism, capitalism, exploitation and oppression. As John Hutnyk asserts hybridity is a 'rhetorical cul-de-sac, which trivialises black political activity in the UK over the past twenty-five years' in favour of a middle class hybridity theory (1997: 122).



The concept of 'hybridity' itself has been divided into degrees of hybridity. To talk about hybridity per se would be to lose sight of the fact that each individual has their own perception of what ethnicity and their cultural roots signify to them, and how far they are willing to cross or erase cultural boundaries. Chris Barker (1997) cites six possible identifications, ranging from ethnic absolutism at one end, to an anti-essentialist position at the other. At one end of the spectrum, the cultural traditions are seen as distinct and separate viz. 'Asian' or 'British' and further along there is a juxtaposition viz. 'Asian' and 'British', allowing a movement between the two, when and where appropriate, and then a hybridization occurs out of recognition of difference to produce something new, namely 'British Asian'. Another involves one cultural tradition obliterating the other, which could involve assimilation, or cultural domination and imperialism, namely, my parents are 'Asian' but I am 'British'. At this end of the spectrum identities are constructed out of shared concerns, based on factors such as class, ethnicity, gender and age. This anti-essentialist position is seen to construct identities around strategic identifications and alliances. My intention is to explore these differing degrees within my sample of interviewees, alongside any evidence of essentialism.

I choose to engage with the argument that although hybridity challenges static and essentialist notions of ethnicity, it may unintentionally, provide a gloss over existing cultural hierarchies and hegemonic practices (Anthias 2001). A new generations of cultural theorists, many of ethnic minority origin, are highly critical of the concept of being 'hybrid' or cultural hybridity,

maintaining that similar to multiculturalism, hybridity largely promotes essentialism. Looking at the various contexts in which the discourse of hybridity, as a body of postcolonial theory and thinking, has been invoked to reformulate Asian youth identities, one of the key questions asked is who exactly is calling whom 'hybrid', for what purpose and for what effect (Ahmad 2001). Homi Bhabha's 'third space' is challenged as basically a reinscription of the crude assimilationist assumption that non-white migrant communities are essentially different, but in positive terms, whereas in the colonial context they were blatantly constructed negatively. The criticism put forward is that Bhabha's definition of hybridity effectively reproduces the dualism of the 'in-between cultures' approach, that condemned migrants to problem-status: 'If Bhabha sets out to defeat essentialism, he goes full circle. The constitutive state of timeless hybridity that he imputes to the postcolonial migrant suspends non-whites in a prison with walls every bit as high and deterministic as colonial discourse. It is just another way of ignoring the internal class, regional and other means of differentiation within immigrant groups' (Ahmad 2001:75).

The critique presented here is of 'hybridity' as being based around a reductive racialized premise; a need for hybrid identities because this then highlights that ethnic minorities' cultural identity on its own, minus the indigenous culture, is alien, 'Other' and 'different'. The notion of hybridity therefore, in many ways reinforces the essentialist ways of thinking about ethnic minorities and helps maintain the status of the dominant culture. Ali Ahmad

stresses that the experiences of British Asian youth, recorded by anthropologists, remain essentialized by a narrative that evacuates class, region, personal biography and anything other than their status as 'second generation' Asians in discussions of their identities; the 'Asian Cool' of the Nineties is quoted as a reflection of this hierarchy of hybridity. He is equally critical of Hall's usage of 'migrant youth' and his statement that they form the 'leading-edge cultural phenomenon of our time - the "multi" in "multicultural" and the "cool" in "cool Britannia"' (1999:10). Such talk of the power of the migrant culture and its positive effect on British culture, is seen to only serve to maintain the marginality of the non-whites within the British national imagination in some respects; behind it lies the 'multiculturalist will' that constructs them from elsewhere (Araeen 2000).

This 'multiculturalist will' emerges in critiques from within the field of art. It is seen to dictate that black artists must 'have some sign in their work that they are coming from somewhere other than here'; the notion that non-white artists can only enter the dominant culture 'by showing their cultural identity cards' (Araeen, 2000:16). Here a crucial distinction is made between 'multiculturalism' and 'cultural pluralism' - the former, based on separation of the dominant majority culture from the cultures of the minority population, so they cannot interact to create the necessary change for all citizens in society to be equal. This creates a subcategory which minority cultures fall into; a supplement of the majority culture, that helps preserve the dominant culture.



In order to align multiculturalism with hybridity, it is necessary to highlight some of the similarities. Five kinds of multiculturalism have been identified ranging from isolationist, accommodative, autonomist, critical or interactive to cosmopolitan (Parekh 1997). They are not however, collectively exhaustive or mutually exclusive, in that there is constant overlap. As with the different types of hybridity mentioned earlier, there is a spectrum ranging between the more essentialist approach, namely 'isolationist', which entails cultural groups leading autonomous lives and engaging in minimal mutual interaction when necessary, in order to live together, and the more assimilationist approach that typifies 'cosmopolitan' multiculturalism. This type of multiculturalism is all about creating a society in which individuals engage freely in intercultural activities and create a cultural life of their own, with no commitments to specific cultures. It is suggested that cultures are viewed as resources or a range of options or items that they can choose between as if in a global supermarket. This is the 'cosmopolitan' multiculturalism favoured by diasporic intellectuals. A culturally plural society, on the other hand, is seen to be one in which all its culturally different components are considered equal, so they form a heterogeneous whole or a community of communities and this whole defines society without notions of minority and majority cultures. As a result all individuals have the full right to decide for themselves how and where they want to locate themselves.

The need to break away from 'the Orientalist tradition of exoticizing otherness' is what other critics suggest. They propose a transnational cultural

studies approach, which operates beyond exclusionary national concerns and engages with the globalized and diasporic nature of South Asian cultural formations and textual practices (Sharma et al 1996: 8). In an attempt to rethink the notion of diaspora, one of the suggestions made is that new Asian dance music can be read as a cultural form that narrates diasporas, dynamically affirming, transforming and mutating, both imagined and material linkages. Diaspora can therefore be considered as a site in which music provides opportunities to formulate new alliances beyond national boundaries, rather than only as a fantasy of 'home' affirming 'tradition' or 'origins' (1996:9).

The debate, which I consider of significance to this thesis, is the selling of 'cultural Otherness' or 'ethnicity' as a master signifier of marketing and advertising in the arena of music and particularly the rise of 'World music' since the 1980s, and in other cultural industries such as fashion, design, entertainment, cinema, theatre and dance. It has been described as 'belated enthusiasm for marginal cultures - part of the latest phase in the normalizing, controlling and exploitation of 'Otherness' for the reproduction of hegemonic culture' (Sharma et al 1996:28). This reduction of 'other' cultures to essentialist and traditional fixities - as victims of progress, as objects of tourism, as the labour of migration and the colours of multiculturalism - is seen to valorize hybridity as their encounter with the emancipated West.' (ibid: 29). Those Asian cultural productions marked as 'hybrid' are seen as worthy of being celebrated, as being enlightened and politically emancipatory. This cultural

logic is seen to parallel the marketing practices of transnational music corporations who promote global music stars through skilful deployment of the rhetoric of ethnicity and hybridity (Hutnyk, 1996). This desire for tradition and primitivism in World Music is seen to have all the workings of neo-colonialism, whereby global 'ethnic' stars placed within their own particular imagined, but fixed ethnicities, become acceptable. This hypothesis surrounding hybridity particularly in popular culture, as simply reinforcing the cultural hierarchies in society, is one that I will explore in relation to my young diasporic sample.

It is widely acknowledged that 'racialized and ethnic identities are driven by contradictions, ambivalences, situational and contextual variations and unpredictable individual and group alliances', making them always remain provisional and unfinished, and there is continual switching, making and re-making of identifications (Rattanasri 1994:122). For example, the hybridity in the art of Black British artist, Chris Ofili, is seen to mark a break from multiculturalism, and instead is seen to approach ethnicity in a more ambivalent mode by 'using double-edged humour, irony, parody, the constant interplay of opposites, their violation of taboos and their incorporation of black popular culture' (Corrin 1998). Ofili's 'blackness' is seen to be a constructed, contingent identity that moves away from the fixed identities, perhaps typifying the 'situational' aspects of identity that I seek to explore. Depending on the context of his art and the critics, he plays on those aspects of his ethnicity that suit that particular moment or time in history – as



Niru Ratnam (1999) suggests, his work breaks away from the notion of multiculturalism and instead approaches ethnicity in a more contingent mode.

The above critiques seek to turn the more utopian ideals of hybridity on their head - that the way forward is through 'the end of the innocent notion of the essential black subject' and birth of a cool hybrid one (Hall 1987). Criticisms aimed at this theoretical approach see it as a step back towards colonial discourse and cultural hegemony, highlighting the reality that majority culture still dominates minority cultures; just as multiculturalism failed to provide equal status for all, hybridization similarly fails, even when cultures intermingle. Even within the more forward-thinking/liberal, creative fields of art and music, the construction of 'Otherness' is seen to generate the enthusiasm for the novelty factor – the 'exoticization' of Otherness, giving rise to phenomenon such as 'Asian Cool' and a desire for all things 'Bollywood'.

'Asian Cool', for example, has only been recognized in second and third generation young people, who are seen as emancipated and have therefore managed successfully to blend Western and Eastern culture. Hence Talvin Singh becomes cool, whereas the Bhangra scene a decade earlier was not; ethnic fashion in the form of 'Bollywood' has now entered the mainstream whereas first generation women in 'saris' and 'shalwar kameez' were ridiculed. A hierarchy of hybridity has been acknowledged. This stylized, commodified Asian hybridity constructed by an elite few 'above', who seek to

enjoy the benefits of representing those 'below' while escaping their realities, is described as a 'champagne hybridity' (Ahmad 2001:84). And the main criticism in this debate surrounding 'Asian Cool' and hybridity is that it has not simply appeared from somewhere overnight, with the 'second generation' as sole agents in the historical process. In failing to acknowledge 'the first generation' and its role in starting the processes of intense cultural intermixture, it is maintained that complex shared British Asian histories are being erased, and consequently the term 'diaspora' becomes analytically useless and complicit in this erasure (Ahmad 2001:83).

Placing too much of an emphasis on hybridity is therefore considered to have negative connotations and reductive racialized premises; simply to applaud cultures because of their hybridity is seen as both naïve and a collusion with the dominant mode of thinking. For my thesis, the significance of these debates lies in trying to understand the extent to which diasporic youth of today are aware of this 'exoticization' of their ethnicity, and the ways in which they may feel able to manipulate it for their own benefit. When constructing their identities, do they deliberately assert 'differences' in order to get ahead, or 'sameness, if more beneficial - situating themselves according to circumstances? Do they possess the contingency skills as described in relation to second generation artists such as Ofili?

One of the crucial factors I suggest that needs to be considered in relation to hybridity is that the global hybrid sphere is largely the domain of an elite who

are able to live a cosmopolitan lifestyle by virtue of their possession of 'cultural capital'. In the main, promoters and supporters of hybridity dwell in the more liberal field of arts, literature, academia and the media, and therefore have more faith in fluidity, diaspora and the crossing of boundaries in a seamless fashion, by individuals. What of cultural constraints, the desire to maintain traditions and a sense of belonging or diasporic consciousness?

### **Diaspora: 'home' and 'belonging'**

A simple definition of 'diaspora' is that it refers to a connection between groups across different nation states whose commonality derives from an original, but maybe removed homeland; as a result a new identity becomes constructed on a world-scale that crosses national borders and boundaries (Anthias 1998). The concept of 'diaspora' brings in a number of other related areas such as the majority/minority axis, borders, the 'global' and 'local' and the whole notion of journeys or 'routes'. Another definition offered by Avtar Brah states that 'diasporas, in the sense of distinctive historical experiences are often composite formations made up of many journeys to different parts of the globe, each with its own history, its own particularities. Each such diaspora is an interweaving of multiple travelling; a text of many distinctive and, perhaps, even disparate narratives' (1996:183). The suggestion is that the diasporic imagined community is far from fixed or pre-given.



It is maintained that for young people of the diaspora, their legacy is most valuable as a mix, a hybrid, recombinant form, that is indebted to its parent cultures, but remains assertively and insubordinately a bastard: a 'transcultural mix' (Gilroy, 1997:323). Hall, writing about the new diasporas as products of hybridity, similarly states that the hybrids retain strong links to and identifications with the traditions and places of their origin but states that they are without the illusion of any simple "return" or "recovery" of the ancestral past; no simple reproduction of traditional forms which are not transformed by the technologies and the identities of the present (1987: 170). Either because they will literally never return to these places or if they do they (the places) will have been transformed out of all recognition by processes of modern transformation. In that sense, there is no going home again. In terms of diaspora, we are made to think of identities not in terms of absolutes of nature or culture but in terms of contingency and conflict, of identities in motion, routes rather than roots – 'creolised, syncretized, hybridized and chronically impure cultural forms' (Gilroy, 1997).

This hypothesis surrounding diaspora and hybridity has fundamentally changed the manner in which young African, African Caribbean and Asian British lives are perceived and represented in academic discourses.

Expressions of creativity are not seen as pale imitations of a prior culture in an alien context, but have their own aesthetic logic based on diasporic intermixture. Hall's 'diaspora' is seen to produce a non-coercive and more diverse conception of ethnicity. He states 'the diaspora experience...is

defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of “identity” which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference’ (Hall, 1989: 220). These post-modern definitions of diaspora (Hall 1989; Brah 1996; Clifford 1994) suggest it as a condition that is put into play through the experience of being from one place and of another, and it is identified with the idea of particular sentiments towards the homeland, whilst being formed by those of the place of settlement (Anthias 1998: 565).

‘Home’ is extremely important in the understanding of the diaspora since it represents a beginning, a point of origin and a longing for a return that may be a romanticised notion or a reality that is achieved. On one level, home can simply mean a private domestic space with one’s family, or more symbolically it could represent a notion of a place where one has a desire to belong, to lay claim to an identity, or construct an often imaginary continuity: a quest for roots of origin. Home is often constructed in relation to kinship and especially parentage, and journeys may take many different forms; there is commonly a construction of identity through the telling of the life story (Woodward 2002). Benedict Anderson (1991) characterises national cultures as ‘imagined communities’ bonded by a deep sense of belonging to an imagined common origin and mythical past, and goes on to say that what matters in constituting communities is not the authenticity but the ‘style in

which they are imagined'. The imaginations of deterritorialized people are seen as being marked correspondingly by 'absentee patriotism and long-distance nationalism' (Pieterse 1995:49), and sustained by a collective homeland myth, fetishized through cultural memory and transnational desires, and represented as mythical landscapes, invented traditions, stories and ceremonies (Safran 1991).

Narrative accounts are often of most interest to social researchers for gaining an insight into the ways individuals understand and interpret their place in the world. A narrative is an account that tells a story, and more specifically, a 'narrative of location', is a story about how we place ourselves in terms of social categories such as those of gender, ethnicity and class, at a specific point in time and space. A narrative of location is also seen as simultaneously about dislocation and alterity; with the growth of diasporic communities, movements and settlements have become more complex, dismantling any certainties that may have existed around belonging and placement (Anthias 2002). Narratives of location are seen as structured more in terms of a denial (through a rejection of what one is not, rather than a clear and unambiguous formulation of what one is), and such narrations involve imaginaries of collectivities and how borders are constructed. Stories are told in terms of the bipolar: positive and negative, partly framed through the relation to whom and for what.



'The quintessential experience of the twentieth century migration' is seen to have contributed to the notion of diaspora and the need for belonging or a home in the minds of dispersed and dislocated people (Berger 1984). It is also seen to have contributed to the development of identity politics and the notion of identity crises – a sense of dislocation between the space one occupies and the emotional attachment or meanings attached to the place that one has left. It is maintained that migration always has a relationship with 'home', and new identities are formed in some dialogue with home, whatever the reasons for leaving, and however far; 'home is an imaginary construction which tells us more about people's hopes and desires than any actual experience or history. The notion of 'home' in particular is seen to cross the boundaries between the real and the imagined and between the past, the present and the hoped for future (Woodward, 2002:72).

In terms of diasporic identities, the notions of 'belonging' and 'home' are the areas that have most significance when examining second and third generation youth from Africa, the Caribbean and Asia. There are still direct links with a 'homeland' or a 'mother tongue' and therefore how is this sense of belonging created? Do journeys back to the homeland awaken a greater connection with one's roots, and hence establish more specific belonging to a particular place of origin? Or are the young people more attuned to the idea of being of a diaspora - dislocated and dispersed; connected to an imaginary home in an imaginary, distant past. What are their narratives of location? How relevant or important is one's ethnicity and one's cultural roots when in

one's teens, in contrast to when one reaches one's mid to late twenties or early thirties? Does someone in their late twenties have a greater diasporic consciousness or a greater need to belong somewhere?

From my interviews I would like to show the way in which any significant differences exist between the identities of younger members of the youth category and those at the older end of the 'youth' spectrum, who have had different life experiences and travelled different journeys. The reason for choosing to examine the two ends of this generational spectrum is to identify any significant changes that may govern these two points in time. Do these young people follow some kind of life trajectory, whereby at different junctures they go through different stages – starting with their parents and cultural background, then school, their peers and rebelliousness, jobs, choosing partners/marriage, mortgage and responsibilities, and finally, parenthood? Is there a point at which the whole notion of 'belonging', of where they have come from, starts to affect their identity?

## **Section II: Literature Review**

### **Youth Identities**

Within this second section, I engage with some of the literature into ethnic minority youth identities over the last decade or so. By studying the relevant field, I hope to be able to draw on some of the findings in relation to my sample of diasporic youth and the ways in which they construct their identities and 'situate' themselves. My key question is how far do second and third generations move away from their cultural roots and traditions, as suggested by theorists such as Hall, Gilroy and Bhabha? Do they see their culture as a historical entity, changing through the passage of time, or do they maintain that there is a fixed, impenetrable essence of a culture to hold on to and embrace? My purpose is to explore what 'ethnicity' means to these young people and what are the main constituents of their cultural identity?

One of the first areas I want to discuss is the concept of 'youth' – when is one perceived to fall into this category, what is it based on, and how does it compare to 'youth culture' categorizations of the past? For many social commentators youth are seen as a barometer of social change; the future lies in their hands: 'young people's biological, psychodynamic, socially and



culturally-conditioned flexibility gives them a strong, seismographic ability to register deep but hidden social movements, and to express them in the clear language of style (Fornas et al 1995). In the 1970s and 1980s, work done by the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham into youth subcultures, argued that young people established their identity through a process of labelling. Young people expressed themselves and showed a resistance to a hegemonic culture and cultural forms. A seminal text by Dick Hebdige (1979) argues that youth express their resistance to authority through visual styles. The expressive subterranean style of youth subcultures is seen to go 'against nature' and interrupt the process of 'normalization' and therefore represent 'a symbolic violation of the social order' (ibid: 18-19).

Although the notion of youth subculture played a major role in the sociology of youth in the 1970s and 1980s, its significance is felt to have dwindled by the end of the twentieth century. Previously linked with class and resistance, youth cultures are now seen as bound up with commodification and consumption. The notion of 'youth lifestyles' is now seen as more influential than that of youth subcultures. It is suggested that the resistance in which young people now partake is expressed through consumerism and the mass media and as such represents little more than a confirmation of the status quo (Epstein 1998). Another suggestion for the demise of a youth culture as such is the ever- expanding category of youth and youthful behaviour.

Characteristics associated with youth now have mass appeal to people of all ages – a 'fetishization of youth' by people of all ages, who want to embrace a

carefree lifestyle (Aldridge 1969). The interest in leisure and consumption can be seen in line with the zeitgeist of materialism and hedonism, which was seen to particularly characterize the 1980s. Four reasons have been identified for this, including emphasis of individualisation especially amongst the young, the growth of a new young middle-class in service and entertainment/communication professions, debates concerning post-modernism and Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical contribution to the debate on lifestyle (Reimer 1995). Each individual's lifestyle is unique, but at the same time they orient themselves towards the common and the social, chosen in relation to other people.

Lifestyles tend to be associated with the concepts of structure, agency and identity, with the centrality of the notion of identity, and the way they are constructed in relation to social contexts. Hence, lifestyles are not entirely individual in nature but are constructed through affiliation and negotiation, by the active integration of the individual and society, which are constantly reproducing each other (Giddens 1991). Bourdieu (1990) uses the concept of 'habitus' to explain how individuals from a particular place in the social space opt for a particular lifestyle. 'Habitus' is seen as the system of interconnected dispositions that help us to interpret our surrounding world. Each individual's habitus is seen to be unique but similar experiences create similar habitus. Youth lifestyles are no longer seen as just based around class and status but other areas such as ethnicity, gender and religion. Whereas some would argue that there is no protest in youth culture any more, I would argue

that for many from ethnic minority backgrounds, their lifestyles are used to make political statements through fashion, music, literature, cinema and other cultural practices.

In order to understand the debates surrounding being second or third generation Black or Asian it is necessary to recognise the diversity and heterogeneity that compose the categories. Hall's concept of 'new ethnicities' is worth considering with reference to certain ideas e.g. 'black' or 'being black' as a unifying, politicised concept that unifies across ethnic and cultural differences across various communities, giving rise to the notion of 'the black experience'. Rather than being invisible, blacks are now an entity able to challenge, resist and possibly transform the dominant regimes of representation. Hence around this notion of 'being black', cultural politics and strategies come into play that, in the main, contest marginalization. Today, one could quite easily use the word 'Asian' with reference to a variety of people of the Asian diaspora and find that much the same principles apply. Many youth often choose the category 'Asian' in order to be part of a larger, visibly recognized grouping bringing into effect a kind of 'strategic essentialism' (Spivak, 1990), however they then go on to reveal major differences otherwise, in terms of what construct their ethnic differences.

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, second and third generation youth of the diaspora exhibit a 'new confidence' that previous generations did not: they are proud of their roots and cultural heritage and



display this in their cultural/leisure practices alongside their 'Britishness'. Often when asked how they see themselves, they are first and foremost 'other' (Asian, Indian, Black, African etc.) and then possibly the 'same' (British, English). Having 'a psychic investment in the idea of belonging to a people' is something that many of these youth openly display. They do not fear the specificity of collective belonging being essentialized into racism (Brah 1996). This could in part be due to the media, especially youth media, giving credence to the coolness/hipness of 'being Black' over the last few decades and more recently, the phenomenon of 'Asian cool' in the late 1990s – As Ahmad states 'the result was the emergence of Asian Cool, a discourse which rehabilitated a generation so lacking in street-cred that it was once inconceivable to speak of Asians and Asianness as something trendy, but by 1995, the Asian gig had rapidly become the most hip place to go and be seen' (Ahmad, 2001:74).

This acceptance of Asianness is evidenced in a variety of ways: more globally, with celebrities like Madonna popularizing and highlighting Asian fashion ('Bindis' and Henna) and promoting eastern spirituality in terms of yoga and meditation, and fashion designers using ethnic fabrics and styles. The emergence of British Asian record labels and club nights, British Asian musicians such as Nitin Sawhney and Talvin Singh winning major awards, and the mainstream popularity of programmes like *Goodness Gracious Me*, films like *East is East*, *Bend it like Beckham* and the Andrew Lloyd Webber

production of *Bombay Dreams*, also highlight an increasing interest in Asian culture.

Stuart Hall is again important in moving the debates surrounding youth of the diaspora to another dimension, moving perceptions of them as being victims of 'in-betweenness' or 'in between cultures' and hence problem-ridden, towards a group who can now regard their experiences as a source of strength. This hybridity is celebrated rather than perceived as problematic. As long ago as the late 1980s, Hall had identified 'the movement of the white centre towards the black margins', which were seen as oozing confidence and coolness – 'Young people in Britain today are marginalized and yet look as though they own the territory. Somehow they too, in spite of everything, are centred in place: without much material support they occupy a place at the centre' (Hall, 1987).

Current research and writings on British Asians of all generations however, suggests the limitations of hybridity, and the reasons behind many young Asians continuing to embrace and retain their culture of origin. At the heart of it lies the lack of acceptance by many of the white population of 'Asians' as full legitimate members of the nation, forcing them to have to continually negotiate a particular set of multiplicities of ethnic and national belonging which will always make their experience of 'Britishness' different from that of whites, and closer to others of 'visible' minority origin (Gillespie, 1995; Modood, 1994). Evidence is also seen to point to 'the desire on the part of

young Asians to retain a variety of vestiges of their cultures of origin as a positive mark of difference, a refusal to merge invisibly into a nebulous blob of ill-defined Britishness, and certainly not Englishness, which is definitely seen as forever a “white thing” (Rattansi, 2000:129-130).

In the last decade, the emphasis has been clearly based around ‘difference’. ‘Black/ African and African-Caribbean identities have been theorized through the ‘politics of difference’ whereas Asian groups have been transfixed through attributions of ‘cultural difference’ (Alexander 2002:552). In the 1970s and early 1980s, the term ‘black’ included African-Caribbean and Asian peoples under the same banner, which was seen to be a way of unifying disadvantaged people in the protest and struggle against racial discrimination. In the late 1980s and 1990s the move was away from the happy multiculturalist melange of ‘saris, steelbands and samosas’ (Rattansi, 1992) towards the clear division of ‘Black’ into ‘African’ and ‘African-Caribbean’ and ‘Asian’ to include all people of the Asian diasporas. ‘A decade ago...African-Caribbeans and Asians were treated by the dominant society as so much alike that they could be subsumed and mobilised under a single political category. But today that is no longer the case. Today we have to recognise the complex internal cultural segmentation, the internal frontlines which cut through so-called Black British identity’ (Hall 2000:127). A move has been seen away from race and racism towards ethnicity and culture. It is maintained that the category of ‘Asian’ carries with it notions of boundedness and fixity in opposition to the more theoretically fashionable accounts of



identity formation which define contemporary black identities – ‘cultural difference’ versus ‘the politics of difference’ (Alexander, 2000). When debating notions of hybridity, diaspora, syncretism and urban cultures, the focus has largely been on African and African- Caribbean cultural production versus white culture, with Asian cultures left by the wayside, unexplored and untouched (Back, 1996).

A number of cultural theorists have commented on these almost oppositional approaches taken towards African-Caribbean and Asian cultures, with the former regarded as the visible, cutting edge of marginality, seen as fluid, fragmented, creative and negotiated; and the latter almost invisible to all, apart from the anthropological gaze, and seen as static, internally homogeneous and externally impenetrable (Housee and Sharma 1999; West 1993; Werbner 1999; Alexander 2002). Others write about Asian identities, remaining possessions of birth and blood, the repository of ‘tradition’ and ‘being’; whereas African and African-Caribbean identities call for the dismantling of notions of culture and nation and belonging (Rattanasri 2000). While African-Caribbeans cultures are defined as individualistic, free of community ties and late or postmodern, Asian cultures are seen as collective, community-bound and pre-modern. In a nutshell, African/ African-Caribbean cultures are defined through ‘youth’ whereas Asian cultures are envisaged through ‘age’ or ‘men with beards’ (Banerjee et al 1996). This placing of African-Caribbeans and Asians as the objects of opposed and irreconcilable versions of cultural difference, it is suggested, can increasingly

be typified as the 'difference as colour' versus the 'difference as culture' position (Alexander 2002: 566).

Studying 'youth' has always proven problematic, however adding the dimension of 'race' and 'ethnicity' further complicates matters. 'Ethnicity', like one's class, gender, religion or occupation, can be utilized as a form of 'cultural capital', which one can to a degree, choose to foreground or keep in the background (Bourdieu 1984). This fluidity and contingency of ethnic identification finds expression in several ways, ranging from markers of identity, to definitions of boundaries and the meaning of identity itself, often varying over time and situation (Pieterse, 1997). 'Ethnicity' must be seen as an inherently unstable category, which should be thought of in terms of a continuum or spectrum, with the spectrum of ethnic identification ranging from low-intensity ethnicity or opportunity ethnicity, to ethnic fundamentalism, from ethnicity as an occasional, optional identity to ethnicity as a total identity. Individuals or groups do not occupy stable, fixed places on this continuum, for the degree of identification itself may vary according to the situation (Pieterse 1997: 370-371). As stated earlier, I use a continuum which ranges between essentialism and assimilation with hybridity somewhere in between, in order to understand how my sample formulate their identities and ethnicity. To add a further dimension to the exploration of ethnicity, I look at the most popular form of mass media within the home, namely, television, in order to provoke debate about the representations of race and ethnicity and discourses surrounding 'racialized regimes of

representation' and 'the end of the innocent notion of the essential black subject' (Hall 1987). How do my sample of young second and third generations seek to be represented?

'Black' and 'Asian' identities are continually shifting, sometimes occupying the dual consciousness of being 'other' and 'British', and at other times they are largely based around 'difference' and marking out 'us' and 'them'.

'Difference' and 'sameness' involve the marking of boundaries, which at various moments are redrawn and transgressed. There is always contestation in identity. Having identified some of the many debates that surround identity and the young people of the diaspora, I shall to draw on some empirical evidence in this section that cover areas of particular relevance to my own research. By sifting through the body of recent research into various aspects of ethnic minority youth, some of the key conceptual and theoretical debates used for evaluating cultural identities, are identified here. Within this literature review, research findings are analyzed in order to problematize notions of hybridity and identity. In the main, the debates revolve around essentialist and non-essentialist notions of identity, hybridity, dominant versus minority cultures, and the creation and/or maintenance of ethnic boundaries or borders.



## **Problematizing Hybridity and Multiculturalism**

By studying urban multiculturalism in ethnically and racially plural contexts, Les Back (1996) examines the dialogue, transmission and hybridization of ethnicities; the historical and absolutist notions of minority cultures and identities being abandoned in favour of 'cultural syncretism'. The syncretic cultures of the young people in his study are seen as examples of 'liminal' forms of ethnicity. Drawing from the works of Franco-Dutch folklorist Arnold Van Gennep (1960) and anthropologist Victor Turner (1969), the concept of 'liminality' refers to a state of separation from the mundane aspects of life; a conjunction between a previous state and a new public identity – for e.g. between childhood and adulthood. Back maintains that the alternative public sphere occupied by black and white young people in South London, constitutes this liminal space. This cultural space however, is not necessarily stable or devoid of the potential of invoking racism; there are stresses on these syncretic cultures from external forces that often lead to the creation of fissures.

Back examines the complex interplay of essentialism and anti-essentialism at the everyday level, and how forms of social exclusion and inclusion work through notions of belonging and entitlement in particular times and places. There are multiply inflected forms of social identities being expressed in cities

like London, that are being met by multiply accented forms of popular racism. This is what he calls the 'metropolitan paradox' (1996:7). For example, some of the black youth on one estate are seen as 'coconuts' or people co-opted to white norms. This range of insult implies an essential character of blackness or 'a kind of ethnic absolutism that separates cultural and racial absolutes from the historical circumstances that give them meaning' (Gilroy 1987:43-71). What Back suggests is that this fixing of identities of the black youth is to misrepresent their dynamic and negotiated character; the ability of their being 'partially soluble' within the boundaries of the neighbourhood, while having the potential to develop within the wider black collectivity. There is a spectrum of social identities available to young people, who seem capable of recognising a number of 'race' vernaculars. In the context of youth identities in South London, claiming 'difference' makes new formulations of identity possible – the processes of inhabiting and 'vacating' social identities is seen to manifest itself daily in adolescent peer relationships. Back's conclusion is that there is a development of a cultural space based on 'private understanding rather than public rulings' (Suttles 1968:26).

Back makes a couple of key points that are of particular interest to me. The first is about the durability and significance of these liminal ethnicities - at that specific point in time they may defy boundaries of race and ethnicity, but by their very nature they are unstable because they are conjunctions, so what happens when these young people grow older or leave the estate? As Back himself states, it is impossible to substantiate these claims of a 'truly new form

of entitlement or iterant belonging, free of racial absolutes' without research that monitors these trajectories longitudinally (1996: 249). The other point Back makes is that although there are merging of black and white cultures, and black young people have won a degree of inclusion, another racialized group – the Vietnamese, are excluded and marginalized. The explanation that Back provides is that it has little to do with correlating the decrease in racism and exclusion with the duration of migrant residence, and more to do with local and national ideologies. It shows complex, racialized hierarchies that exist. Unlike the black youth, the Vietnamese are located within a discourse that defines them as cultural outsiders, who have no legitimate claim for inclusion. His research highlights a version of hybridity that consists of tenuous cultural bridges that have been constructed in a liminal space and are therefore prone to destruction, if the circumstances alter.

A dominant discourse that uses 'ethnic reductionism' or relies on equating community, culture and ethnic identity, and the reduction of anybody's behaviour to a symptom of that equation, is one key aspect of Gerd Baumann's (1996) research with which I wish to engage. A culture consciousness is seen to exist that stresses the religious, political, sociological or individualist conceptions of culture; a view of culture as the stable, collective and distinctive possession of communities. Focusing on young Asians in Southall, West London, Baumann found that they not only engage in the dominant discourse about ethnic minorities, but also in an alternative demotic discourse, about 'culture as a continuous process and community as



a conscious creation; people were making use of 'dual discursive competences' (1996:34). There is acknowledgment of an Asian culture that reaches across religious boundaries and traditional institutions like caste – a sometimes political unity and the forging of comprehensive cross-community convergence, for example Bhangra music, which provides a symbolic and expressive focus of a new Asian culture.

The notion of 'reification' of culture and dominant/demotic discourses is another interesting aspect of Baumann's work - the cultural conservatism, discovered amongst some Southallians, which helps maintain traditions, conventions and proprieties as characteristic of migrants, who often remove themselves from the cultural process itself, and then seek refuge in reifying or actualizing that cultural process into a cultural heritage of their ethnic or religious community. This is seen to contribute towards maintaining the dominant discourse. The demotic discourse, which allows Southallians to create new communities as well as subdivide or fuse existing ones, is not seen as an opposite or an alternative to the dominant one. It is interpreted as arising from a plethora of different contexts, proven when looking at the use of the word 'culture' in the parlance of most Southallians which is still largely reserved for describing the stable heritage, about which, or against which, one negotiates change.

For many the concept of 'culture' designates a seemingly immutable object, amidst all their creative processes of changing community allegiances,

community formations and community loyalties. The explanation Baumann gives is that if Southallians were to use 'culture' as an idea as negotiable as 'community', their usage would deprive the community of their *raison d'être*, as the dominant discourse has fixed it. A 'community' that cannot point to a 'culture' for which it stands, serves or owns, risks losing legitimacy – such is the hegemony of the dominant discourse. The conclusion reached is that Southallians are not dupes of the dominant discourse, but neither worshippers of hybridity or border zones for their own sakes. By contrast they develop their discursive competences with the social facts of everyday life, and cultivate judgements of when to use what discourse and in what situation. It is the contestation of culture and community, their shared meanings and their interrelations that lie at the heart of a shared Southall culture (1996:35). This fluidity juxtaposed with the maintenance of borders is something that I will explore in relation to my own sample of young people of the diaspora.

The contestation of cultural identity is also the focus of Marie Gillespie's (1995) research, based in Southall. Her study analyses young Punjabi Londoners' negotiation of identities through re-creative consumption of television and 'TV talk'. As Gillespie states, becoming adult in Southall means being able to situate oneself in, and move across a range of different frames of references – in relation to global and local, diasporic and national contexts as well as in relation to the politics of class, community, race and gender. Talking about television is seen to be a crucial forum for

experimentation with identities – in negotiating with and between peer and parental cultures. Common experiences of television are seen to provide referents and contexts for talk, which are explicitly or implicitly about identities and identity positions.

Patterns of television consumption are linked to age and gender, and attempts are made to identify correlations with other factors like religion, class and parental background by drawing on Paddy Scannell's ideas (1989, 1991). He suggests that broadcasting can be seen as a shared cultural resource among audiences that plays a major role in re-articulating the boundaries between public and private spheres; and reveals a great deal about structures of identity, performance and social interaction. Gillespie also takes into consideration the fact there has been a radical shift in the movement of relations between global centre(s) and the margin(s) (Julien & Mercer 1988), which is reflected in the changing notions of what 'Britishness' and 'belonging' mean. Within contemporary culture there are always simultaneous tendencies at play e.g. homogenization vs. differentiation, integration vs. fragmentation, and juxtaposition vs. syncretization (McGrew 1992).

Unlike other studies which have mainly looked at the processes of syncretization in relation to expressive cultures of Afro-Caribbean settlers in relation to pop music, dance and street style, (Gilroy 1993; Hebdige 1988; Hall, 1987), Gillespie looks at British Asian youth culture and examines



cultures of consumption rather than expressive culture. Her sample of young Asians was found to use the strategy of familiarising one's otherness in terms of other 'others', something viewed as typical of a subaltern culture seeking a public platform in a national and transnational context (Spivak 1988). This is recognized as a complex process of negotiation whereby one strives for equality and recognition in British society, without however, affronting parental values.

Hindi films are identified by Gillespie as being a binding force for the family and its unity: these films are used to legitimate a particular world view but also open up contradictions, with young people using the films to deconstruct traditional culture, and the older generation using them to try and foster cultural and religious traditions. The Indian sacred soaps **Mahabharata** and **Ramayana**, based on Hindu scriptures, provide Gillespie with an example of 'devotional viewing' that she contrasts with the viewing of Australian soap **Neighbours**, which she calls 'devoted viewing'. The distinction attempts to show how the viewing of the sacred Indian soaps sustains and enhances a commitment to religious and cultural traditions in families, whereas the viewing of the Australian soap, a favourite amongst young people in Southall, as another domestic ritual, involves intimacy and censure. Although western soaps are also governed by a moral framework and are didactical, they are seen to lack any cosmic/religious dimension and therefore, provoke intergenerational conflict.

Gillespie constantly encountered thinking in terms of binary oppositions in the everyday perceptions of cultural interaction and change amongst people of all ages in Southall; oppositions of east and west, tradition and modernity, poverty and wealth as rooted in the history of imperialism and colonialism. This aspect of her research highlights the constraints that exist on the identity formations of these young people - the role of the nation state and social factors such as class, gender, religion, locality and generation are identified as constantly setting limits or constraints on this process of self-invention.

The distinction between 'intergenerational differences' and 'conflict' is a subject area frequently discussed in relation to Asian youth. Avtar Brah (1996) maintains however, that although differences may exist between generations, conflict does not necessarily follow, because in many cases the generational relationship may easily have been negotiated and managed in such a way as to favour understanding and shared perspectives. From her own earlier study conducted in the 1970s, Brah (1979) found there was a great deal of understanding between the young Asian people and their parents – the older generation expressed sympathy towards their young growing up in Britain and the young people seemed to understand if not always agree with the constraints that were binding on the parents. A considerable overlap was found in the attitudes, norms and values of the two age groups. A number of possible intersecting factors are identified as responsible for this solidarity: subtle cultural meanings which from childhood, are associated with certain relationships, events, behaviour and social perspectives; psychic investments

in emotionally charged bonds with family and relatives; the security derived from being part of a community; and the shared experience by both parents and children, of their structural position in society (1996:43).

Gender and religion, which are often deeply embedded in cultural traditions, play key roles in influencing one's subjectivity and identity – an aspect I wish to explore. Chris Barker (1998) examined the contradictory and fragmented forms of moral identities and discourses that emerged, when researching discussions of soap operas amongst British Asian girls. The girls' discussions are insightful in the way in which ethnicity and gender are intertwined within the moral discussions – although ethnicity is a significant frame of reference, Barker points out that gender becomes even more important. Soap talk is seen as one of the ways British Asian girls make intelligible and manageable, the ethical and moral dilemmas that face them.

Research by Jessica Jacobson (1998) into the interrelationship between religious and ethnic identities in young British Pakistanis, indicates that religion is a more significant source of social identity for these young people than their Pakistani ethnicity. The special significance of religion is due to the fact that Islam by and large, is considered central to the young people's sense of who they are, and its teachings are seen to help orient their behaviour in all spheres of life. In contrast, their being 'Pakistani' or 'Asian', namely their ethnicity, is seen to be a more peripheral aspect of their sense of identity. The explanation lies in the boundaries which frame their religious identities and



those that frame their ethnic identities. Ethnic boundaries are seen as becoming increasingly permeable whereas religious boundaries remain clear-cut and pervasive. One of the key areas of exploration is in what terms do these young people conceive of their own nationality, ethnicity and religion and why does religion have such a strong appeal?

Jacobson argues that theorists should be careful not to overestimate the extent to which aspects of identity are malleable and subject to reinterpretation. It is important to recognise that there are limits to the extent to which individuals choose to redefine themselves and the groups to which they belong. She found that ethnic identity is seen as 'natural' or a 'given' fact of life, something that one is born into, whereas religious identity or Islam, according to her sample, is a matter of personal choice, based on reflection and self-conscious determination (1998:153). This impermeability of aspects of identity amongst young people of the diaspora is an important aspect that I will explore amongst my own sample, both in terms of religion and ethnicity.

Identity has been theorized as a form of representation which constitutes us as new kinds of subjects and thereby enables us to discover places from which to speak; a strategy for opening up avenues for new speaking trajectories (Hall, 1990). Ien Ang (1994) focuses on the precariousness of identity, primarily on the peculiarities of the operative dynamics of 'Chineseness' as a racial and ethnic category. What is concluded is that 'Chineseness' is a homogenizing label whose labels are not fixed and pre-given but constantly

being renegotiated and re-articulated, both inside and outside of China. It is maintained that the myth of the (lost or idealised) homeland, the object of both collective memory and of desire and attachment, is constitutive of diasporas and this ultimately confines the nomadism of the diasporic subject (1994: 5). David Parker (1997) similarly, explores the identities of young British Chinese in an attempt to place their experiences alongside Black and Asian youth, only to discover that Britain has very little significance in their lives compared to Hong Kong. The relative prosperity of Hong Kong, in part, gives them both, an opportunity and an incentive to return to their parents' place of origin, and evidence shows that several hundred young Chinese people had left Britain for Hong Kong in the previous few years, on completing their education.

The lack of investment in British-based national identifications – in stark contrast to young Black and South Asian people's identifications, was in part attributed to the dispersed Chinese settlement, both within and beyond British cities, making it harder for young Chinese people to secure the cohesion that might result from daily contact with their peers. The notion of a British Chinese youth culture is not easy to identify – for example, there is no musical form to match 'Bhangra'. Factors seen to contribute to this broader imaginary are the bustling Chinatowns around Britain on Sundays, children learning Chinese for a couple of hours, parents stocking up on provisions and Chinese videos and then returning to the family takeaway. Chinatowns are seen to nurture a rescaling of identity as a combination of both Hong Kong

and new British regional identities, especially in the centres of Manchester, London and Birmingham (1997:71-72). This insular aspect of identities is one that can be applied to a variety of ethnic groups in Britain in varying degrees – depending very much on the social and cultural environments within which they live.

The concept of 'ethnic options' marks a differentiation between the ways different ethnic groups are treated and perceived by society. Some are perceived to have greater cultural capital or 'ethnic options' that others, which they can call upon when necessary. In her study of second-generation Chinese Americans and Korean Americans' ethnic identities, Nazli Kibria (2000) draws some conclusions about the differences between African Americans and Asian Americans. By comparison with African Americans, who are said to possess little or no ethnic options, Asian Americans are seen to have recourse to particular ethnic and national backgrounds. Asian Americans are regarded as 'authentic ethnics' by the wider society, unlike African Americans (whose ethnic ties with Africa were wrested from them). As a result they are expected to maintain distinctive cultural practices and be knowledgeable about various aspects of East Asia. Kibria argues, that as a result, Asian Americans are able to counter racialization by claiming a particular ethnic heritage, in a way that African Americans cannot claim a specific ancestry. Others suggest that African Americans possess less ethnic options than other groups mainly because their racial status is paramount in the eyes of mainstream American society (Nagel 1994; Waters 1990; Tuan 1998).



Miri Song (2001) similarly, contrasts Asian Americans with African Americans in an attempt to see whether ethnic minority groups differ in their abilities to choose and assert their ethnic identities, namely possess more ethnic options. Her conclusion is that there is no clear consensus about what 'ethnic options' really are – whether they can clearly be based on socio-economic status or ethnic heritage and origin connected to some 'distant' homeland. Rather than adhere to overly neat analytical distinctions between racial and ethnic identities, she suggests that future studies concerning minority groups' ethnic options need to examine the variable and complex intertwining of racial and ethnic identities as experienced by disparate ethnic minority groups. There is a need for a more holistic and complex understanding of 'ethnic options' – one not only shaped by race and ethnic ancestry but also the ways in which particular groups possess or lack various forms of cultural capital, and through the varied ways in which they counter and negotiate imposed and unwanted images and identities. The competent usage of one's ethnicity in particular contexts and the ability to turn it into 'cultural capital' is another aspect that I wish to demonstrate amongst my sample of ethnic minority youth.

Linking in with the concept of 'ethnic options' and cultural capital, is the history of cultural separation and marginalization that surrounds the creation of 'black' British youth identities. Claire Alexander (1996) maintains that 'race' in the past was seen as the sole defining characteristic of black communities. 'Black' people (African and African-Caribbeans) were, and to an extent still

are, seen to be defined primarily by the colour of their skin, with difference ascribed in 'racial' rather than 'cultural' terms (Alexander, 1996). For example, Asian minorities in Britain are seen as proper objects for anthropological study, and Africa and African-Caribbeans by contrast, are problematic objects of investigation (Benson 1996). Alexander's assertion is that even today Black people are often defined primarily by the colour of their skin; something she concludes from her fieldwork and participant observation of a group of young black men in London. She shows however, that black young people are moving away from the notion of a culture of despair and nihilism, and are more concerned with the construction of new cultural alternatives in which identities are constantly changing. In her later work on Asian Gangs, which examines the moral panic created by the media around Muslim identities in young British Asians, Alexander highlights the manner in which 'young Muslim men are now in the spotlight as the epitome of crisis and cultural atrophy' (2000:XIV). Both her studies concern the creation of 'raced identities' amongst young men, with the focus on change, contestation and ambivalence, and the tension between external definition and self-invention (ibid).

All the research cited above has assisted in directing me towards particular avenues of exploration. What links most of the above research in my literature review is the problematic nature of hybridity and how the concept cannot be applied to certain ethnic groups in particular. Factors such as gender, religion, intergenerational influences, ethnic options and cultural capital create boundaries or markers that often prevent straightforward hybridisation or

syncretism. Unconscious organic hybridity is something that takes place amongst most individuals, however, in these studies the findings point more emphatically towards the maintaining of tradition, cultural continuity and collective belonging. Collective identities involve forms of social organization, postulating boundaries with identity markers that denote essential elements of membership (which act to 'code' people) as well as claims that are articulated for specific purposes. The identity markers (culture, origin, language, colour and physiognomy etc) may themselves function as resources that are deployed contextually and situationally (Anthias 2001).

Representation is another area vital to the understanding of identity, which includes signifying practices and symbolic systems through which meanings are produced, and through which one can make sense of one's experiences and develop a sense of being. Systems of representation construct places from which individuals can position themselves and from which they can speak. Representation, however, is also questioned in terms of the power it wields, including the power to define whom it includes or excludes. All signifying practices that produce meaning involve relations of power. Identities are therefore, not simply found, but made - culturally and politically constructed through political antagonism and cultural struggle. Sarita Malik (1998) maintains that the state of race relations, broadcasting, television policy and the social constructions of race in Britain are all affected by representations on television. The marginalization and stereotyping of Black people on television is linked to popular assumptions of what 'Blackness' or 'Black-Britishness'



constitutes. Historical specificity is seen as important in locating the different modes of representation in the historical context within which they are produced. That the field of representation remains a place of struggle is most evident when we examine contemporary representations of blackness. Within the next chapter, I choose to analyze representation in relation to media, particularly television, to add another dimension for further understanding the identities of my sample of respondents; and the ways in which they interpret constructions of ethnic minorities on the British small screen. Contemporary theoretical debates on race, ethnicity and multiculturalism in television will be examined in some detail.

## **Chapter Two**

# **CHANGING REPRESENTATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS OF MULTICULTURALISM ON TELEVISION**

Debates and issues surrounding race, ethnicity and multiculturalism in British society can often be understood in terms of the media. Television, in particular, acts as a major signifying system of representation in post-modern contemporary society, with imagery often seen to reflect the social, political and cultural climate of the day. Within this chapter, I seek to identify the transitions within ethnic minority representation and multiculturalism via the changing images on the small screen. For example, how differently were ethnic minorities portrayed in the 1960s, compared to my period of research in the late 1990s, bordering the start of the new millenium?

As a powerful means of communication, the media can both, produce and circulate a number of different ideologies. James Curran (1991) states that the media are principal institutions of the public sphere or the 'fourth estate of the realm'. The public sphere, being the space between government and society in which private individuals exercise formal and informal control over the state,

for example, in the form of elections. The media are central to this process in that they facilitate the formation of public opinion by providing a forum for debate (1991: 2). Television today, brings the public sphere into the private sphere of people's lives, by beaming into their living rooms and homes, reaching a vast cross-section of society, regardless of class, gender, race, ethnicity or age. What I wish to explore is the way in which people interpret television in relation to these factors; in other words, how does their identity affect their interpretations of televisual images? Does the social context in which they view the programme also affect their interpretations?

In the 1980s, Stuart Hall (1981) drew attention to 'television's basic grammar of race', which identified three basic stereotypes for representing black people in Britain – slave, native and entertainer, which led to major debates around racial stereotyping on television. Although in the last decade, more rounded representations of ethnic minorities can be identified, the portrayals still engender debate, discussion and 'TV talk' amongst ethnic minority viewers. Television is regarded as a leading resource for both the deconstruction and construction of identities – 'implicated in the provision and the selective construction of social knowledge, of social imagery through which we perceive the "worlds", the "lived realities" of others and imaginary to reconstruct their lives and ours, into some intelligible "world-of-the-whole" ' (Hall, 1977:14).



Popular culture plays a more prominent role in the lives of young people, attempting to create their individual identities. The cultural medium of television has a central role in their leisure time, and has become increasingly influential in terms of the images and representations it portrays. By concentrating on research that focuses on young people of ethnic minority backgrounds, I examine their expectations of television, and how they negotiate with images of ethnicity on screen. From initial observations, I have found that amongst my sample, those with more essentialist views bring this to their critical interpretation of television programming and the representations it creates, whereas others adopt a more *laissez-faire* attitude. In other words, the more politicized individuals tend to demand more positive representations, to compensate for years of stereotyping and negative portrayals. Processes of identification are key to the viewing of a programme, centred around sense-making – textual content is mediated through a subject's horizons of understanding, perspectives usually in some respect already familiar, and inevitably ideological (Wilson 1993). Lawrence Grossberg (1987) suggests that identification may move as a 'nomadic subjectivity', from locating oneself with a subject on the basis of understanding a text, to identifying with other characters on the basis of making sense of a life. Hall (1984) notes that recognition is central to identification, crucially important in securing that circuit of understanding between audiences and messages.

Within television hermeneutics, the aspects that are of most relevance to my thesis are the distinctive interpretations of texts based on cultural differences of gender, class, race and ethnicity. Viewers can distance themselves from the dominant ideology of a text or a programme's familiar, stereotypical representations through reasserting their personal identity. This is done through a reclaiming of authenticity and the validity of particular experience in the face of the 'imposed generalities of an increasingly homogenized mass culture' (Silverstone 1990: 173).

Studies conducted in the late 1980s and early 1990s into ethnic minorities and television, have examined youth of the diaspora and their culture of consumption. The focus has largely been on the way in which they construct new forms of identity, shaped by, but at the same time reshaping images and meanings circulated in the media and the market (Gillespie, 1995: 2). With increasing globalization of the media and the medium of television, as such, there can be no cultural homogenization; fragmentation and pluralization means that people can no longer be easily fitted into slots or niches. One can at any moment fit a global pattern, and at other times, belong to a very niche section of society? By looking at past empirical studies and research, the objective of this chapter is to plot the significant changes in black imagery on the screen and explore the effects on the targetted audiences – what are the second-third generation youth of the diaspora in search of when watching television? How does this differ from the viewing needs and desires of their parents and the older generation? Are they satisfied with the type of

programming they see on television, and what type of programming do they feel will widen the range and diversity of representations?

Before tracing the development of ethnic minority representations on British television, particularly from the late 1980s, the 1990s, into the new century, I would like to draw on some of the important historical debates and theories on the role of television and its audiences. One of the first perspectives on media audiences was the 'hypodermic' theory of media effects, progressed by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer of the Frankfurt School of Social Research in the 1930s; the implication being that the media was seen to have the power to 'inject' a repressive ideology into the consciousness of the masses. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, media consumers were increasingly recognized as not completely passive audiences. In the 1970s, a new perspective on media consumption was the 'uses and gratification' approach which gives the viewer an 'active' role. It suggested that audiences are active producers of meaning and it is not about the media 'doing' things to them, but what they 'do' with the media. The criticism of this paradigm however, was that it was far too individualistic and did not take into account other sociological or cultural perspectives.

What followed in the 1980s was the encoding/decoding model of communication, developed by Stuart Hall (1980) at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, which built on all the past perspectives and has the most relevance today. This approach suggests that mass



communication is a structured activity, with the production of messages, controlled by those in control of the media institutions. The media is seen to set agendas and provide cultural categories and frameworks within which members of society tend to operate. Although it incorporates some of the uses and gratification theory it does consider that interpretations may be socially and culturally structured. The premise of this encoding/decoding model is that a message can always be interpreted differently and although certain readings may be preferred or proposed over others, they cannot be closed around one reading; in other words, they are polysemic. Messages encoded one way can always be decoded another way. Interpretations and decodings are in many ways dependent on the range of decoding strategies and competences of the audiences. What also developed in the 1970s, with the influence of feminism, was the interest in psychoanalytic theories and gender. This has greatly influenced subsequent feminist works on the construction of gendered identities and gendered forms of spectatorship, which I shall draw on in relation to soap operas, later in this chapter (Mulvey 1975; Brunsdon 1981; Modleski 1984; Gledhill 1987).

Most recently, it has been suggested that societies dominated by the media have seen the enlargement of the public sphere through the media saturation; 'the public' is seen to enter the domestic sphere via the television set but boundaries between the public and private are also seen to be blurred (Giddens 1990; Thompson 1995). Television is seen to contribute to the cultural politics of identity by giving one an insight into a vast range of

identities and voices – a diversity of representations that one may normally, not get in everyday life (Barker 1999:155). As Karen Ross (1996) asserts popular mass media is seen to play a major role in the transmitting and maintenance of cultural identity, through a repetitive display of cultural norms and values, which eventually come to be seen as simple ‘truths’. It is suggested that images of black communities have historically been constructed from a white perspective, and consequently from a position of domination, which has had clear consequences on the perception and portrayal of those black communities in Western societies. When an image of blackness is seen, therefore, it does not describe the actuality of being ‘black’ but rather references a particular way of thinking about blackness (Ross 1996: XIX-XX). Hall (1981) suggests the media can be seen as a largely political institution that is primarily concerned with the production and transformation of ideologies. My thesis, which will study young interviewees’ consumption of television in order to gain further understanding of their identities, will engage with some of these perspectives. What for instance are the decoding strategies that my sample use when watching television, to what extent is their spectatorship ethnicized or gendered and how aware are they of the role of television in both the public and private sphere?

In the 1990s, different facets of black life have been explored in innovative and interesting ways within mainstream television programming, posing the question of whether specific multicultural units are necessary or just increasingly redundant. With an emergent second and third generation of

ethnic minorities from the Asian subcontinent, Africa and the Caribbean, there is the likelihood that there will be much less demand for separate strands of programming. It could be assumed that these youth, often regarded as cultural hybrids, lack close links with the 'motherland' and embrace the diaspora in a more selective and less essentialist manner. Perhaps their interest lies in seeing better and more varied representation within mainstream programming, rather than ghetto programming or marginalization of any description. With rapid de-regulation of television and a multitude of cable and satellite channels such as ZeeTV, AsiaNet and B4U, public service broadcasting has been put under additional pressure to cater for diverse cultures and ethnicities in order to keep them watching terrestrial broadcasts. This is another aspect that I examine in relation to my sample – do they believe that the time is right to abolish multicultural strands of programming? And are their ways of seeing that different from the parent generation?

The politics of race representation has changed over the decades – moving from often negative visibility, based on stereotypes, towards more positive representation, with the emphasis, today, on simply being realistic and true to life – a move from a kind of essentialism towards assimilation. Earlier portrayals of Black and Asian people on screen dealt with issues and problems they faced as immigrant peoples, and were seen to pose to the host country, and the problems they faced, namely racism and prejudice. They were the problem, the victims and the foreigners with odd clothes, customs,



culture and food habits, who found it difficult to integrate, especially in the case of Asians. This is what came across in early programmes on British television. Following the 'race riots' or uprisings in the early 1980s in Brixton, Toxteth, Bristol and Southall public debates about race relations were stepped up and efforts were made to focus more clearly on eradicating racial inequalities. During the 1980s, attempts were made to show minorities as part of society as a whole and not simply as outsiders or a population on the periphery; attempts were made to introduce characters into mainstream programmes. There was a pressure on television to celebrate the differences, both positive and negative. Most important was the need for authentic and diverse experiences, not necessarily only positive ones: a need to appreciate that 'there is no one homogenous black community, no single black perspective, no single black story, nor one black storyteller' (Ross 1996: 139-140).

One interesting area of debate is whether television simply reinforces attitudes rather than creates them, and that there is no real relationship between television viewing and the degree of racism expressed in society. The media is seen to have a responsibility to ensure that stereotypes are not perpetuated – just as they can 'exoticize' and 'otherize' cultures, they can also promote multicultural coalitions and offer countervailing representations (Stam and Shohat 1994). One of the main criticisms of the history of television is that it shows a lingering, colonial mentality that existed in the earlier decades with a number of stereotypes of Blacks and Asians, created in the

audience mind – the ‘black savage’ in need of civilising by the white man, and the passive and docile Asian. Hall (1995) maintains that although the blatant portrayal of base images of blacks such as that of ‘the slave’, ‘the native’ and ‘the clown’ or entertainer may have disappeared, their traces can still be observed, reworked in many of the modern and updated images. This is examined in some detail in relation to key programmes of the late 1990s, mentioned more than once during my initial interview discussions, and regularly within the media, for example, **Goodness Gracious Me** and **Da Ali G Show**. Are these programmes really just parodic or are they always tainted by the aforementioned genealogy?

What I hope to investigate with relation to the responses of my interviewees, is what are their expectations and understanding of the television representations of race, and what they see as the acceptable face of this representation? For many ethnic minority audiences the role of television should be to represent a positive picture of their race, without the clichés and stereotypes that have originated from ignorance, in the past. For others, television should simply portray all peoples in the same light, without highlighting ‘difference’ or ‘otherness’ but by emphasizing homogeneity. There has in the past been a strong argument that has chosen to focus on the positive/negative dichotomy, without allowing the portrayal of life as it truly is, with both the positive and negative aspects juxtaposed. An interpretation of this approach is that the powerlessness, which racism in daily life imposes on the ethnic minority communities, can in some way be countered by the

powerfulness of representation of those communities on television (Daniels and Gerson 1989). Others suggest that the words 'stereotype' and 'positive image' need to be banned from the vocabulary of television, simply because there is a possibility that the debate on stereotyping may itself be in danger of becoming stereotypical.

A number of incisive suggestions on the media representations of race and ethnicity highlight the fluid, contingent power being played out in media discourses, institutions and audiences, and the need to challenge multicultural policies as they stand. Ross asserts that 'what black minority viewers want is not something huge and extravagant but something small and relatively easy to provide: the opportunity to see themselves, in all their diversity, portrayed credibly on that most powerful of media - television' (2000: 26). The dimensions of media and diasporic consciousness are explored by Annabelle Sreberny, who suggests that 'work that focuses on racism, xenophobia and the dynamics of exclusion in western societies often overlooks the cultural memory and attachments to other places and spaces that ethnic communities hold dear' (2000: 180). She suggests that the metaphor of media as a 'binding' force is a useful one, but more importantly, what needs further exploration is the kind of roles that various media forms play within the complex set of psychological, sociological and cultural dynamics that comprise diasporic reality; the means through which contemporary diasporic consciousness may be defined and sustained.



Another idea that particularly challenges the shortcomings of multicultural policy is Charles Husband's (2000) argument that the media should help construct a 'multi-ethnic media public sphere'. Rather than the media simply creating dialogue between citizens, he suggests that it must reflect the diversity present in society in such a way as to facilitate the autonomous expression of ethnic identity of both minority and majority ethnic groups, and national minorities. It is also suggested that there is a vital need for exchange of information and cultural products across these communities of identity. Using the idea of citizenship and the public sphere to open up mutual understandings, he suggests laying down a framework of expectations for how the media should operate in a multi-ethnic society. A shift from the 'reactive' i.e. 'what the media do' to a 'proactive' i.e. 'what the media should do'. Rather than examining data and facts about what the media have done, we must make explicit, our political stance as individuals in society (2000: 200).

The debates surrounding television representations continue, but what needs to be acknowledged is that there has been a marked transformation of British television and its audiences over time. What earlier generations of ethnic minorities then watched or enjoyed, sometimes through lack of choice, differs considerably from what the next few generations choose to watch. I will trace some of the changes that have occurred, by looking at the history of ethnic minority programming and some qualitative and quantitative research over the years, focusing in particular on programmes mentioned by interviewees. I

shall attempt to highlight the way in which there seems to have been a move away from essentialist portrayals of ethnic minorities, towards a more assimilationist reflection of race and ethnicity.

## History of race representation

From the 1950s, images of Asian and Black faces have appeared on the small screen. The programme **Asian Club** televised in 1953, consisted of an invited Asian speaker and an Asian studio audience, and rather than simply discussing Asian themes and problems, the show discussed literature, art and science and was seen to be forward-thinking and innovative. Other early Asian programmes such as **Apna Hi Ghar Samajhiye** and **Nai Zindage Naya Jeevan**, by contrast, were seen to provide a service for the recently arrived immigrant communities, rather than allowing them a voice. Literally translated, the first says 'consider this your home' and the second is 'new life'; both, through the titles, suggesting that the aim of these programmes was to integrate the outsider/foreigner into the host culture. By and large in the 1950s and 1960s, discourse surrounding all the race portrayals focused almost entirely on the problematic nature of being an immigrant, and the hostility from the dominant culture. The issues discussed were seen to reflect the social, economic and political concerns of the day. Earliest examples of social

conscience programming included **Does Britain Have a Colour Bar** (1955) and **People in Trouble: Mixed Marriages** (1958).

By the 1960s the 'problem' of race and immigration culminated in the infamous 1968 Enoch Powell 'rivers of blood' speech, and began to be reflected in both the fictional and factual programmes of the day. The sitcom **Till Death Us Do Part**, then and now, continuously subjected to much criticism and analysis, featured a racist bigot Alf Garnett, who voiced a whole repertoire of anxieties and prejudices. The creator of the series, Johnny Speight has always vehemently refuted accusations of simply satisfying the audience of the day, but many feel that even if his intentions were noble the series backfired. Stuart Hood asserts however, that 'wherever the series has been shown the effects have by no means been what the author intended. If racism is widely spread in a society, as it is in ours, such shows will be seen by a considerable part of the audience as validating their views' (Hood 1980:26). Another media critic similarly, maintains that the key question raised by the series and its politics is whether we are invited to laugh at him or with him. From the huge audience reception that the series had, he believes that it is highly doubtful that most people were laughing at Garnett (Medhurst 1989).

One of the arguments put forward about comedy and British sitcom is that it is at the heart of dialogue about contemporary society, a form of social commentary that often tries to tackle heavy social issues in a light format, and



yet the question needs to be asked why such a large proportion of British sitcom laughs have rested on notions of racial difference. It is also necessary to acknowledge that it is here, in the genre of sitcom, that the greatest misconception about television and society exists; to assume that television simply reflects what it is going on out there, is to overlook the fact that representation does not merely reflect, but is an active part of society. Comic representations of race and black Britain, therefore need to be seen not simply as reactions to an external reality, but as active shapers in how race relations come to be seen (Malik 1998: 229).

Comedy has been one of the television genres to regularly feature ethnic minorities and tackle the subject of race. Guised by conventions of sitcom humour such as double entendres and outlandish situations, a number of comedies emerged in the 1970s, which are now renowned for their notoriety, for example, *Love Thy Neighbour* (1972-5), *It Ain't Half Hot, Mum* (1973-81) and *Mind Your Language* (1976). The latter, set in an adult English language class, featured blatant stereotypes of every racial minority, which were used to poke fun at the cultural differences. The first comedy series featuring an all black-cast titled *The Fosters* was broadcast in 1976 on LWT. The series was seen as focusing on the ordinariness of the family without constant references to the problems of being black. This gave rise to the first British black soap *Empire Road*, that featured both Asian and black characters, and ran for two seasons between 1978-79. Writing in *The Listener*, Philip North comments that the 'trivialisation of the black community had finally been achieved

whereby the minutiae of life could be explored without constant references to black and white tensions (Listener, 16.11.78).

The 1970s have been described as a period in television history that made a big investment in race comedies. Within the wider context of multiculturalism, programme makers aimed to represent the cultural characteristics of the ethnically diverse communities, and to comically depict the difficulty people faced fitting in with the British way of life. In the end, however, it has been concluded that many of the comedies which claimed to be about 'race', boiled down to being about 'blackness', which nearly always came to signify 'trouble' (Malik 1998: 237-8). The 'comedy as social service' argument, which has routinely been put forward, with the claim that a black presence on screen will familiarize and naturalize them to the mainly white audiences of the time, has been vociferously criticized. The criticism centres on the disparity between programme aim and the latent effects i.e. the comedic racist attitudes often only reinforcing racist ideologies in the audience. It is felt necessary to recognise the context-bound nature of representation in general, and comedy in particular, in order to make sense of audience interpretation (ibid.). As Hall states: 'Jokes about black life which blacks make about one another to a black audience – the generic, 'signifying trope of distinctive vernacular popular forms in the black diaspora... can be 'read' very differently when played across a more culturally differentiated audience (Hall, 1995:21).

Before the creation of Channel Four, in the early 1980s, London Weekend Television made some positive attempts to cater for minority audiences with the setting up of the London Minorities Unit in 1980. Under the supervision of John Birt, the then head of factual programmes at LWT, the Unit's aim was to cater for those minorities less well catered for than others – black people, gay people and youth. The magazine series *Skin* was broadcast in 1980 and although aimed mainly at black audience, it tried not to alienate white viewers who might possibly tune in. This crossover met with criticism for being too preoccupied with the race or the black/white problem. The other major criticism was that the series made no distinction between the problems of Asian and Afro-Caribbean communities. The BBC, around the same period put out the series *Ebony* (1982), which had a much higher profile than some of its past multicultural programming. One of the production team from the series argued that before *Ebony* much of the black community had felt alienated by the BBC and its lack of black images on mainstream television. In 1984 the BBC, broadcast *Network East* aimed at Asian audiences.

The real breakthrough for black minority representation, however, was seen to come about with the birth of Channel Four in 1982, with its official mandate on minority broadcasting. Prior to its creation, the depiction of blacks was largely seen to be restricted to a repertoire of a few basic characters e.g. – slave, native, entertainer or villain, using a process of simplification and reduction to give black people visibility. This showing of a narrow view of black experiences was not only seen to deny the existence of a wide range of



diversity amongst black people, but it also burdened each image with the role of being representative (Hall, 1981). In the 1980s and more so in the 1990s, an understanding has emerged that black communities are neither homogenous or all-good, and therefore a constant demand for positive images would be simply failing to acknowledge the conflicts and contradictions that exist within minority groups and in society at large.

Controversy often arises from the positive/negative framework that cannot acknowledge the ambivalence of the stereotype – and how the same imagery can give rise to different, often contradictory readings. On the creative side, those acting or producing are put under added pressure by being perceived as the symbolic representatives of the ethnic community from which they come. What Julien and Mercer (1988) postulate is that marginality imposes a double bind on black subjects who speak in the public sphere: ‘Within such a regime of representation.... first individual subjectivity is denied because the black subject is positioned as a mouthpiece, a ventriloquist for an entire social category, which is seen to be ‘typified’ by its representative.

Acknowledgement of the *diversity* of black experiences and subject-positions is thereby foreclosed. Thus, secondly, where minority subjects are framed and contained by the monologic terms of the ‘majority discourse’, the fixity of boundary relations between centre and margin, universal and particular, returns the speaking subject to the ideologically appointed place of the stereotype – that ‘all black people are the same’’. What they essentially argue is that if every black image, event or individual is expected to be

'representative', this will only homogenise the diversity of black experiences. This is what Mercer calls "the burden of representation" whereby the artistic discourse of hitherto marginalized subjects is circumscribed by the assumption that such artists speak as "representatives" of the communities from which they come – a role which not only creates a burden that is logically impossible for any one individual to bear, but which is also integral to the iron law of the stereotype that reinforces the view from the majority culture that every minority subject is, essentially, the same (1994 : 214).

The style of programming, followed by Channel 4, has allowed independent ethnic minority producers more freedom to create programmes for particular audiences that they wish to cater for, whether African, African-Caribbean, Asian, black lesbians or black youth. A schedule of niche programming has emerged, an approach also used by BBC2, to pinpoint particular viewers.

There has been a definite move towards catering for a more fragmented audience, arising from the rapid restructuring and burgeoning number of channels, available through cable and satellite services. There is also a significantly greater presence and visibility of black representations on television – as presenters and newscasters, on light entertainment programmes, in soaps, in sports and within the area of youth programmes.

Hall (1995) emphasises that television is more than simply 'a window on the world', however, it does play a major role in creating an image in one's mind of the Britain we live in today – as racially and ethnically heterogeneous and multicultural. He goes on to state 'that increasingly the small screen – like the

big screen before it – marks out the critical tension across which the ‘culture wars’ - between a rampant nostalgia for a lost Englishness and the emergence of a vigorous multiculturalism are being fought out’ (1995:15).

Many of the groundbreaking programmes of the 1990s, however, have not been without controversy, much of which stems from the very audiences at which they are aimed. Although seemingly representative, they are seen to be lacking on many fronts. For example, *Baaadasss TV*, a late night youth programme on Channel Four, was criticized as ‘showing nothing but contempt for Black Britons’ and as being ‘just another nigger minstrel show’ (Phillips 1995). It was also accused of ‘amounting to little more than white programme makers telling black audiences what they define as ‘cool’; the notion of a freakish black culture was deliciously revelled in *ad nauseum*’ (Malik 1998: 304).

The popular media has been referred to as a ‘mythical arena’ within which one can try on different identifications for size and play around with our imaginary selves. Cultural expression and representational images are seen as sites where politics of identity are played out, but they are also the terrain over which struggles occur. Forms of cultural expression are seen, not to produce pristine ‘reality’, but to offer ‘aspects of reality’; for example, in showing a portrait of blackness it does not describe the actuality of being black, but instead references a particular way of thinking about blackness – not about being black, but about being thought of as black (Ross 1996). Others



see 'the constructed images' and 'constructing eyes' as referring to the ability of individual viewers to negotiate or challenge the implicit messages of the text. Negotiation however, is a finite activity because at some point the viewer will make a judgment based on their own conceptions of blackness, which may originate from any number of factors (King 1992).

What needs to be recognized is that media representations are not simply produced in a creative vacuum, but are strongly influenced by the social, political and economic ideologies of the day. For many, television's historical treatment of blacks and other ethnic minorities has paralleled society's treatment of these groups – exclusion, marginalization, ghettoization and stereotyping are some of the key processes that are seen to give rise to this treatment (Cashmore, 1994). The need for finite cultural categories and the obsession with racial purity and ethnic absolutism has been repudiated and the notion of a multi-ethnic, multi-layered culture has been put forward; a 'Black Atlantic' culture, which embraces, Africa, America, the Caribbean and Britain all at once, creating a new and vibrant cross-culture (Gilroy, 1993). The emphasis today, is not simply on replacing the negative stereotypes with positive ones, but on seeing a *range* of images that demonstrate all the diversity and richness of ethnic minority cultures. It is felt that this would release 'the burden of representation' that most black actors and producers are made to carry – of having to shoulder the burden of representing an entire heterogeneous black population in one single production (Mercer 1990). As stated by Julien and Mercer (1988: 4): 'If only *one* voice is given the 'right to

‘speak’, that voice will be heard by the majority culture as ‘speaking for’ the *many*, who are excluded or marginalized from access to the means of representation’.

In an attempt to deal with the influx of immigrants from Asia, Africa and the Caribbean in the Fifties and Sixties, the concept of ‘multiculturalism’ came into being. The purpose, as defined by the then Home Secretary, Roy Jenkins, was to take the pressure off assimilation and integration, which he saw as neither possible or desirable, and to instead recognise ‘cultural diversity’ and encourage ‘mutual tolerance’ (Chamberlain, 1998:47). Over time this has been incorporated into the media output of the nation, more noticeably on television. With the growing ethnic minority population, and hence a substantial minority audience, the various British broadcasting networks have felt pressured to cater for minority audiences, in order to attract audience ratings. Since 1991, the BBC has had a Multicultural Programmes’ Department, which was an amalgamation of the previously separate Asian and African-Caribbean Units. In 1995, however, this department was disbanded, with an Asian Programme Unit remaining at Pebble Mill, producing and commissioning programmes, and an Executive Producer overseeing the commissioning of programmes for the African-Caribbean audience from Manchester. Yasmin Anwar, commissioning editor for multicultural programming at Channel Four in the late 1990s, describes the department as acting as a creative catalyst within the channel, by reflecting the cultural diversity of Britain. She stated that under 35s in Britain generally

acknowledge the multicultural nature of British society, and the fact that 'TV is 10 years behind .... It has developed along parallel lines of experience tending towards separatist shows in the Eighties. Television's challenge now is to reflect the diversity and let the nation speak for itself' (1999:23).

An interesting observation by Hall (1998) is that although the term 'multicultural' relates in complicated ways to what is distinctively 'British', this can only become a reality if 'British' can include the multicultural. He identifies the way in which over the last few decades black people have moved from feeling like 'foreigners' in Britain, to feeling comfortable and 'at home' in Britain – 'in cultural and symbolic terms, the black presence today is more palpably and affirmatively present, and this does mark an important historic shift' (ibid: 40). 'Street culture' is the area that he identifies as having a very black feel – 'the stylisation of their racialized bodies is a striking feature of contemporary popular and visual culture, something which has made them the defining force in street-oriented British youth culture'. This 'street culture' is described as a 'zone of enforced glamour and enforced sexuality' in which the 'exotic character of the black body takes on an absolutely powerful charge and becomes a particular and ambivalent subject of desire' (ibid: 41). The question I pose is what do the second and third generations, born and bred in Britain, expect of television representations of themselves? Would they embrace the imagery of street-oriented Black culture as a true portrayal or just another stereotype?



What needs to be understood, in terms of programming, is that many of Britain's younger 'ethnic minorities' although they may have roots in a diaspora, want to see more realistic and relevant representations of themselves. They do not necessarily see the need for multicultural programming units, but simply more attuned and sympathetic programme makers, who acknowledge them as part of society as a whole and therefore, as just another character in a play, film or programme, whose race is as significant as it would or would not be in a real life situation.

## **How well are we represented? Research into ethnic minority audience and programming**

For decades, the debate has raged about the visibility of black faces on the small screen, and more importantly, the type of portrayals of minorities that have been reaching the viewing masses, who apart from the television images may never have contact with these diverse peoples. Over the years much research has been conducted to ascertain how ethnic minorities interpret the way they are represented in the mass media, including images on television. In most cases, the findings similarly, reflect the dissatisfaction of ethnic minorities with representations on television, ranging from unhappiness with

the predominance of stereotypes, to the lack of decent programmes that specifically caters for their needs and enjoyment.

Research conducted by James Halloran *et al.* (1995) at the Centre for Mass Communication Research at the University of Leicester looked at ethnic minorities on television by using samples of Asian people in Leicester. Through interviews and discussion groups, their television consumption was examined in terms of what they thought of television output, what they hoped to see in the future, and the factors that affected or constructed these views, for example, ethnic, cultural, social, economic, religious, linguistic, educational influences. In an attempt to ascertain the wider context of their media behaviour, various questions about their social lives and activities were asked – including religious involvement, attendance of festivals or other community events, and travels abroad, particularly to their country of origin.

In terms of programme likes and dislikes, a pattern seemed to emerge, revealing a generation gap, with older people preferring news and documentaries and younger people preferring soaps, adventure programmes, game shows and comedies. One quote from a discussion group was: 'Asian young people and children are happy with what television provides. They have been brought up here and accept it with the same likes and dislikes as white kids'. When asked the question 'how do you feel television portrays your own particular ethnic group?', over three-quarters of the sample expressed a critical or negative reaction. Another criticism expressed was the

media practice of classifying all people from the Indian sub-continent as 'Asian' and hence the failure to distinguish or recognise the diversity and different social-cultural backgrounds. Over 60% of the sample wanted more attention given to, and a more informed coverage of ethnic minorities, their interests, cultures, lifestyles and mother countries. They also wanted more Asian faces on television and involved with its production. The main suggestion, put forward, was the need to be presented realistically, as an integral part of a multi-cultural society, not simply as yet another stereotype.

An Independent Television Commission content analysis study by Guy Cumberbatch *et al.* titled 'Ethnic Minorities on Television' (1996), examined the frequency with which people from ethnic minority groups (referring to 'people of colour' which included Black African-Caribbean, Asian, Far Eastern, South and Central American, Native American, Polynesian and Middle Eastern people) were represented on television. It took into account their level of appearance and the types of roles they played, compared with their white counterparts. A four-week sample of prime time television was analysed: made up of 1331 programmes and 675 hours; factual programming made up 64% of all programmes, whereas fiction was only 36%. What emerged was that over one third of all the programmes had ethnic minority participation – they appeared frequently in national news programmes (in over one half of all such programmes). Less than one half of all films (49%) included ethnic minorities, as was the case in all light entertainment programmes (47%). Ethnic minorities, however, featured more infrequently in



other programme genres –fiction programmes (44%), sports programmes (30%), factual programmes (26%) and childrens' programmes (21%). Those programmes produced in the US, featured ethnic minority characters more frequently: nearly 49%, compared with UK programmes (35%) and Australian programmes (34%). BBC1 and ITV were broadly similar in the proportion of programmes which included ethnic minorities - BBC1 (42%) and ITV (45%) while just over one quarter of all programmes on BBC2 (26%) included ethnic minority characters, compared to over one third of programmes on Channel 4 (36%) (See Appendix I).

What interests me most about this research is the way in which each genre of programming (37 in total) is examined to see where the highest level of representation takes place. In this process, people off-screen are also considered e.g. news reporters and interviewers. Some interesting and many predictable findings emerge – for example, ethnic minorities are more prominent as musicians and as sports people. The research breaks down the findings into proportions/percentages in as many categories as possible, not simply programme types, but by channels, ethnicity, gender, age, level of participation in a programme, type of role, level of interpersonal respect generated, and the socio-economic group in programmes. This information, I feel, will be helpful in the analysis of my interviews, when discussing some of the points the interviewees may raise.

In another publication of the same year, the ITC focused on ethnic minority attitudes to television; an offshoot of their annual survey into public attitudes to television. Along with the 1000 person sample of people aged 16+, who represent the population of the UK as a whole, the survey was conducted with a further two samples – 150 individuals, aged 16 and over, from the African-Caribbean community, and a similar sample from the Asian community. The main purpose of this was to see how different or similar the attitudes of the minorities are from the majority population. I have found that many of the facts and figures presented, are useful as comparisons with my own research questionnaire and questions. For example, over three quarters of each of the ethnic minority samples favoured specialist channels catering specifically for ethnic minorities (75% and 78% respectively) whereas only 63% of the main sample felt this to be a good idea. On the issue of stereotyping, just over half of the main sample felt that ethnic minorities were portrayed in negative stereotypes whereas 76% of the Asian sample and 88% of the African-Caribbean sample felt that television portrayed negative stereotypes about ethnic minority groups (see Appendix II).

Research into the ways in which ethnic minority communities see themselves represented on television, was conducted by the Broadcasting Standards Commission in conjunction with the Independent Television Commission (Sreberny 1999). One of the most pertinent findings to emerge was that ethnic minority audiences felt that television representations lag behind the social reality of multicultural Britain; that there is a lack of diversity and cross-

cultural connectedness reflected in the media depictions that exist in real life. Minority audiences felt there was a clear need for ethnic representation, not just for themselves, but for a white majority understanding of contemporary Britain. Another criticism made time and again was that characterisations of minorities are weak, and often there, simply to make a point, propose an issue or grapple with a problem. Many felt that this 'burden of representation' should be removed and replaced by 'colour blind casting' of more Black and Asian faces across the range of genres. Although it was felt that there was acknowledgement of multiple identities, it was suggested that representation needed to go simply beyond visibility towards incorporating more nuanced and subtle representations of ethnic and cultural characterization.

The survey took participants from three broad ethnic categories (Asian, African-Caribbean and White/Others) as well as tried to capture generational differences and gender. The sample itself was largely made up of women (71%) and youth, aged between 14-18 (70%) and therefore more indicative of minority opinions, rather than representative of any particular group. The participants, based on one week's television, radio and film viewing, and other cultural habits, completed diaries and this formed the basis of the data presented in the report. In terms of programmes, it was found that amongst the young (14-18), soaps were the most popular viz. *Neighbours* and *EastEnders*. Soaps, however, were also found to attract the most vehement and often the most negative comments, in part because the viewers felt that as the most popular programmes on television, if the imagery here is not seen as



accurate, then there is something clearly wrong with minority representation. Some of the main criticisms were the lack of minority characters, stereotyping and negative representations, inadequacy of cultural representation of minority characters and the burden of representation that often falls on those few characters.

The main conclusion reached from the research was that with society being more multicultural and diverse today, audiences desire this to be reflected across the gamut of programming output. What emerged was that many ethnic minority youth embrace multiple layered identities. 'Many live multicultural lives, inhabiting mixed families and multicultural friendship groups, and choosing eclectic patterns of cultural and media consumption that both replicates but also extends mainstream preferences' (Sreberny 1999: 120).

The seminar 'Channels of Diversity: Race and Television in Britain' held by The Commission for Racial Equality together with the Independent Television Commission and BBC in 1996, examined areas of representation, research and employment in television for ethnic minorities. In terms of representation it was felt that television did not fully reflect the cultural diversity of contemporary Britain. Some of the conclusions reached were that the stereotypical association of African- Caribbean people with sport and media was still perpetuated by the media. The research pointed to the fact that a few presenters/actors tend to account for a large percentage of ethnic minority

appearances on television, for example, twelve appearances of the newsreader Trevor McDonald accounted for 3% of all ethnic minority appearances on factual programming and fifteen appearances by Shefali Oza for 8% of all Asian appearances. It was also felt that construction of the category 'ethnic minority' or 'black' means that specific experiences of particular groups are overlooked in favour of generalised comments, which ultimately neglect the diversity of different communities.

The report identifies some of the key criticisms around the topic of black images and black characters in mainstream programmes. The main points to emerge were that black characters often have a one-dimensional character, rarely developed as rounded and realistic, and in the main, are always peripheral characters. Another point, often reiterated was that insufficient detail was given to the cultural fidelity of characters, namely a Muslim character with a Hindu name, or characters made to do or say things, that are antithetical to established cultural norms. Black characters were also generally found to be associated with controversy and deviance and therefore rarely appeared in aspirational roles that could possibly inspire black children. The lack of images in advertisements was also criticised. The key suggestion made was the need for more diversity on all levels – in terms of characterisations, the types of genres and the media practitioners. My own research, similarly, seeks to identify the levels of content and discontent amongst second and third generation young people about their viewing habits, by interviewing them on matters relating to their backgrounds, interests and leisure practices.

## The changing face of multicultural programming

From my interviews, a number of programmes emerge as key discussion points amongst my sample of ethnic minority youth. Most of them are based within a few key genres of programming – soaps, comedy and talk shows. My interest lies in understanding the significance of these programmes, the representations of minority characters, and the manner in which they are received/interpreted by the young, ethnic minority viewers. One of the programmes, that proved a favourite amongst my sample, was the BBC soap opera/drama serial *EastEnders*, set in the East End of London, which most interviewees referred to as being ‘real-life’ or realistic. Soaps are a particularly interesting genre of programme, because they invite involvement, on a level that goes simply beyond the audience being passive observers, and instead allows them to become involved in producing multiple levels of interpretation. There has been a historical engagement between feminism and soap opera since the 1970s and 1980s (McRobbie 1981; Modleski 1982; Kuhn 1984; Ang 1985; Gledhill 1987; Brunsdon 1981; 2000). Women’s genres have come to include interdisciplinary areas of textual production and study e.g. romance fiction, women’s/girls’ magazines, melodrama, ‘weepies’ and television soap operas. Tania Modleski (1982) argues that the structural openness of soaps is essentially a feminine narrative form. The open textual



structure – unresolved story lines and temporariness of every situation in a soap, allows the viewers to speculate on what may or may not happen next, often leading to 'soap talk'. Soap opera, it is felt, makes public the domestic and affirms the centrality of talking and intimacy in women's lives. This is seen to challenge the patriarchal hegemony that suppresses difference and silences opposition, in order to maintain its symbolic order. In that sense, soaps not only give women a voice, but other oppressed groups.

As far back as 1987, David Buckingham confirmed a shared and collaborative viewing process amongst young viewers of *EastEnders* and their active and critical role. Research around soaps and ethnicity suggests that soap operas form part of the multiplying global resources for the relativization and scrutiny of traditions (Barker, 1998). It is stated that British, American and Australian soap operas present modern Western images of personal relationships, which may clash with more established family morality and obligations of parents of the diaspora, especially of the Indian sub-continent, and their British-born children (Barker, 1998; Gillespie, 1995). The programmes are seen as sites for discussion amongst young people and a point of contact, exploration and confirmation of values between parents and children. In terms of ethnicity, the programme allows viewers to gauge the level of reality in the representations, according to their personal context.

Looking at race portrayal in the 1980s, Karen Ross (1992) concludes that in the soap *EastEnders*, the orthodox racist imagery, which already exists about

ethnic differences, is simply perpetuated – with the dysfunctional black family, the Asian corner shop owners and the strict Muslim family. On the other hand, it is maintained that whether the characters are accurate representations of an ethnic minority person is not as important as the fact that their presence on screen gives rise to discourses; viewers are invited to make sense of questions of ethnicity (Buckingham 1987). In the 1990s, there has been a rethinking of ethnicity on television with more of an emphasis on bringing minorities into the mainstream.

One of the other programmes often referred to by the interviewees was the BBC comedy sketch show **Goodness Gracious Me**. The programme is, in some ways, a case study of minorities entering the mainstream. Created by young second-generation Asians, the programme seeks to portray the experiences of British Asians in a humorous, often satiric way. It explores the various preconceptions and prejudices of both British Asians and white British towards each other, by often subverting racism and stereotypes. For instance, the sketch 'Going for an English' is seen to parody certain types of English people going for a curry. The show, broadcast initially in 1998 on BBC2, got an average of three million viewers, which was considered extremely successful for BBC2, and particularly since 85% of the audience was white.

The producer of the show **Goodness Gracious Me**, Anil Gupta, talks about the paradox at the heart of many of the discussions about 'ethnic' issues: 'on

the one hand we say you must recognise and respect our differences, our colour, language and so on. On the other hand, we say, you must ignore all of that and treat us the same as anyone else. The problem arises only when you try to do both at the same time'. He goes on to say that 'an awful lot of crap is put out in the name of right-on, PC, quota-filling multiculturalism'. 'We wanted to be judged against **The Fast Show**, not a documentary series about police corruption in the Underground Bhangra clubs of Karachi.' The BBC 2 series as it transpires reached a crossover audience, climbing to around the 3 million mark, after the first week, with some 80 percent of the audience being 'white' (Media Guardian, Monday Nov 7, 1998, pp.6-7). My respondents were often ambivalent about GGM and its success, and the crossover audience. One newspaper applauded **Goodness Gracious Me** as a British comedy classic by referring to it as the 'oil of race relations...for when blacks, whites and Asians can laugh together the sting is taken from prejudice or crude generalisation'. It goes on to state that 'such a show would be unthinkable in America: race relations are too brittle and the tyranny of political correctness too pervasive. Old Britain and its more recent immigrants are lucky. When both laugh at each other, both like each other better for doing so' (*The Times*, Jan. 7. 1998).

**Goodness Gracious Me** is a successful crossover comedy that in the past would have been perceived as targeting ethnic minorities alone. Aired in the late 1990s, there are many different interpretations that surround its success – for some, it suggested that mainstream no longer implies the need to be white; for others, it just arrived at the right time - a time when pop groups like



Cornershop, Asian Dub Foundation and Talvin Singh were making an impact on the British music scene, and stars like Madonna, were embracing, and hence giving credibility, to Indian fashion items like 'Bindis' and 'mehndi'. It arrived when it was 'Cool to be Asian'. Whatever the reasons for its success, one of the clear conclusions that can be drawn from the programme is that there is a confidence oozing from the creators of the series about their ethnic status in Britain – they are not Asians, simply living in Britain or Asians with British passports, but 'Asians' and 'British', born and brought up here, with identities that they appear to be comfortable with.

A suggestion that elaborates on the above points is that 'Multiculturalism is mainstream, it is for everyone and it is here to stay. There has been a significant shift in consciousness among younger generations especially those brought up in multi-ethnic milieux, who share local experience, globalized popular culture, in some cases a common class culture, and increasingly, cosmopolitan perspectives and political sensibilities. The kind of intercultural communication, crossovers and creative synergies that arise from multi-ethnic living are to be seen in the new forms of cultural production from the work of Salman Rushdie and Hanif Kureishi to *Goodness Gracious Me*. Multi-cultural and multi-lingual cosmopolitans are in the avant-garde cultural development and change' (Gillespie 1999). The emphasis is on how fashionable it is nowadays to be multi-ethnic or a cosmopolitan, who is capable of moving between cultures and languages with ease.

What one must not lose sight of however, are the differing generational reactions to the innovative comedy **Goodness Gracious Me** from within the Asian community itself. There is acknowledgement that the older, first generation of Asians, are less than happy with many of the portrayals within the show. Many find the show highlights stereotypes and behavioural patterns and customs that they have attempted, over last thirty or forty years, to dispel, and therefore see this show as a retrograde step back. In part, this reflects the complex and conflicting interpretations of multicultural programming by the different generations of ethnic minorities.

Another programme reflecting the sign of the times, was **Da Ali G Show**, aired on Channel 4. The representation presented by the character Ali G is problematic because one cannot specifically identify his purported ethnicity – he exposes the difficulty of ethnic categorisation. He is described as ‘flagging up the flaws of the black/white binary and the notion of ideological choice as common indicators of ethnicity, and also provides an opportunity to look at the shifting sands of the political construct of blackness and the politics of appearance’ (Garfield 2001). One of the interesting points about the character is his phrase *‘Is it ‘cos I is Black’* – which makes us laugh, but also exposes a tension between what is seen and what is perceived. He is described as parodying the desire to be black, but also questioning what makes a black male, black (Garfield 2001). By keeping the audience guessing about the true identity of the character, the audience is forced to question what they think

they are laughing at, which could be seen as a political move by Sacha Baron-Cohen, the Jewish person acting the part.

When the series first arrived on the screen it received much criticism along the lines of whether it was racist or not, in part because the character was played by a white, Jewish man, who firstly lacked 'ethnic insiderism', and secondly, was already seen as more acceptable than other non-white ethnic minorities. Garfield suggests that *Ali G* transcends the colour divide among young people, maybe because many of the codes of blackness – dress, music and speech – have been so widely adopted that they are now mainstream. Black street culture is no longer black, and you therefore no longer have to be black to be black. The crucial point, she makes is that *Ali G* is not generally seen to be representing blackness – but representing a character who is an object of fun for many different reasons, depending on who is looking.

Having highlighted some of the major developments in British television and multicultural programming over the last few years, it is my intention, later in the thesis, to analyze my interviewees' responses to television programming, with these historical and empirical facts and figures in mind. The crucial points to be explored in Part II of this thesis are how 'ethnicized' are my sample when viewing television, and what are their expectations, as second and third generation youth, living in 'multicultural' London? As an audience, is there some degree of similarity in the viewing patterns of my ethnic minority sample? When watching programmes are they 'different' or the



'same' as their parents, peers and/or mainstream audiences? And how successfully are ethnic minorities portrayed on mainstream television?

## **Chapter Three**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Aims and context**

Within this chapter, I outline the rationale behind my methodological choices, detailing research methods and methodologies that have affected my own choice of methods. In terms of the social and political context, this thesis evolved in the late 1990s, and incorporates the spirit of the new millennium. London in particular was awash with interest in ethnic minority cultures and as a result, there appeared to be a 'new confidence' amongst 'second' and 'third' generation youth of the Black and Asian diasporas, previously unseen. Alongside the already more established 'black' street culture, a number of new Asian bands, Bollywood-inspired fashions and a whole spate of British Asians films and television programmes had emerged, which pointed towards a synthesis of cultures in the capital. By contrast, however, the publication of the findings of Sir William Macpherson's Inquiry (2000) into the handling of the Stephen Lawrence murder, identified the prevalence of 'institutionalised racism' as

ingrained in British social institutions, which needed particular attention. The Parekh Report on the future of multi-ethnic Britain (2000) also suggested that a radical shift was needed in the way in which British identity and relations between different groups of citizens were generally defined. One of the main problems identified was the limitations of the dominant language of debate – for example, terms such as ‘minority’ and ‘majority’ and ‘ethnic minority’ were seen to signify fixed blocs or homogeneity and obscure any fluidity or heterogeneity. This contrariety of seemingly different aspects of British society inspired me to research into the ways in which young people of the diaspora ‘position’ themselves in relation to their ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Using London as my chosen site of research I seek to understand how they create a sense of ‘belonging’ for themselves.

My research aim is to engage with some of the main conflicting dimensions of race, ethnicity and identity, particularly theories of hybridity and essentialism. The key proposition of this thesis is that second and third generation young people of ethnic minority backgrounds are neither blind followers of cultural hybridity nor cultural essentialists. Instead, I suggest, that these young people, growing up in a thriving multicultural metropolis exhibit ‘cultural competences’ that allow them to negotiate their sense of belonging, in terms of the context or situations they find themselves in. This process of ‘situating’ themselves, according to the circumstances is what I propose to examine in relation to my



sample. When and to what degree are they 'situational' with their belonging' compared to being 'situated', namely to what extent is there negotiation and fluidity, and when does fixity and rootedness come into play?

Television, which is recognised as a prominent cultural medium within the home, is to be used as a tool to provide a deeper understanding of the formation of identities and the notions of 'belonging' within these young people. Through discussions about various genres of programming, some of which include representations of ethnic minorities on television, I believe another dimension will be added to my research. How these young people view television and whether they watch critically, as members of ethnic minority audiences with ethnic, cultural, collective and political allegiances in mind, or simply watch on a more individual level for pure entertainment, will provide an insight into the strength of cultural influences?

## **Methods & Methodological background of this research**

Before detailing my own choice of methods and methodology, within this section of the chapter, I seek to highlight the different research methodologies and perspectives that have been crucial in helping to decide my own choice of research methods.

My research methodology embraces qualitative research approaches that allow an interpretive approach to social inquiry; the essence of which is analysis and interpretation, through empathetic understanding, of the meaning that people give to their actions (Jankowski and Wester 1991:52). I felt this is better suited than the positivist perspective that relies heavily on the testing of theories through rigorous collections of quantitative data. There was a degree of trepidation with which I opted for qualitative research, bearing in mind some of the criticisms aimed at this method of research. Within quantitative research, the use of random samples, measured variables, hypothesis testing, and statistical results, gives the method an objective and scientific feel. Qualitative research, by comparison is often considered to be unstructured and subjective, anecdotal, personal and biased, and therefore doubts surround its validity (Silverman 1993). For my purposes however, I feel, the study of identities through interviews requires a more flexible and subjective interpretation. For understanding areas of social reality, an essential element of innovation and creativity is required and this flexibility is provided by qualitative methods. I have chosen to conduct interviews since there is less need for quantification and a requirement to focus more fully on the individuals. I want to steer clear of the standardised and systematised breadth offered by quantitative approaches, and instead explore motivational understandings for my interviewees' actions.

Different methods within qualitative methodology have been considered and ruled out for a number of reasons. The survey, which can be factual, attitudinal or social psychological, has been ruled out because ultimately all surveys, however large-scale or small and local, aim to describe the characteristics or opinions through the use of a representative sample.

With their origins in the positivist tradition, they tend to embrace a methodology that has logical similarities to those used in the natural sciences, achieved through standardization, replicability and representativeness. It is predicated on a rigorous approach that aims to remove as much bias from the research process as possible and produce results that are replicable by following the same methods (May 2001).

Unlike many interrogations of ethnicity and identity, (Alexander 1996, 2000; Gillespie 1995; Halloran 1995) my sample is not representative of any particular group, due to the eclectic mix of the different ethnic groups that I have chosen as my sample, and therefore my findings do not easily lend themselves to quantification or categorization.

Research into audiences through surveys, provide broad parameters and some pertinent surface information about the patterns of television viewing of ethnic minorities, but they are not always consistently defined. Through the use of questionnaires and discussion groups, James Halloran et al (1995) attempted to remedy some of these deficiencies. By confining their study to Leicester, where according to the 1991 Census approximately 24% of the total population could be classified as of 'Asian



origin', they examined an ethnic minority group in a highly focused, albeit relatively small way. By using a selection of questions in questionnaire form they studied Asian people in Leicester and their television behaviour, attitudes to television, and preferences for future programming, taking into consideration ethnic, cultural, social, religious, educational and linguistic variables. Through this method, they were able to obtain information from a number of areas ranging from uses, reactions and preferences of television, other media uses e.g. video, local radio, ethnic press to other social and leisure activities, religious beliefs, language(s) spoken, education, links to country of origin, which previous large-scale national surveys could not provide.

This ability to cover a diversity of subject areas through the questionnaires has been particularly insightful, in helping determine my choice and format of semi-structured in-depth interviews. In terms of data collection, I favour face-to-face interviews rather than the use of questionnaires and telephone surveys, simply because once a questionnaire is sent out or distributed for self-completion the researcher tends to lose control over the completion of the survey. There is no way of knowing how the respondents interpret the questions or what considerations govern the way a person answers the questions, in fact no real way of telling who actually fills in the questionnaire. Alongside all these factors, the need to be able to see the non-verbal gestures of the respondent and build up a

'visual-interactional component' between the interviewer and interviewee is an aspect that I see as a necessary part of research (May 2001: 99).

Marie Gillespie's (1995) usage of a combination of quantitative and qualitative data as a feature of her ethnography, with concrete empirical details alongside the more subjective views of her informants, has provided a useful starting point for designing my own research. Gillespie initially conducted a questionnaire-based survey in Southall with her sample of young people, which consisted of direct, open-ended questions, and involved some agreement or disagreement with statements that were gathered from ethnographic data from other members of the peer culture. This was then used as the framework for more detailed interviews with groups and individuals, which formed the basis of the fieldwork. This route was followed because it was felt social surveys count people as units, whereas social anthropology seeks to understand people not as units but as integral parts of and agents in systems and relationships. The criticisms aimed at the survey again indicate some of the weaknesses of positivist, empiricist approaches. They often lack explanatory power, as well as being able to provide only limited meanings into the subjective meanings held individually or collectively. Gillespie therefore chooses to combine the survey data with qualitative methods to overcome some of the inherent weaknesses described. She maintains that what validates ethnography as a genre, is fieldwork based upon intensive, long-term participant observation; a methodology grounded in long-term fieldwork.

An anthropological, ethnographic approach is used to carry out her research into television audiences, in this case young Asian Southallians. 'TV talk' or 'the conversational forms and flows surrounding TV experiences' is one of the areas examined, through the use of intensive and extensive fieldwork methods. This 'TV talk' has been documented in order to observe how it is used by these young people as a 'crucial form of self narration' and as a collective resource through which they can negotiate their cultural and ethnic identities (1995: 23).

My field of study, like Gillespie's, lies within the area of youth, ethnicity and television, and what I have found of particular usefulness in her research is the way in which she uses reflexivity and self-reflexivity in her study of young Asian women. As she suggests 'the self reflexive processes involved can equally illuminate, depress, excite, disconcert, inspire, challenge and even transform the fieldworker's self-awareness (1995: 64). When focusing on young people and their social and personal worlds, Gillespie places herself on the same plane as the researched by employing self-reflexivity. By acknowledging her objectives and biases, they become part of the research findings. What Gillespie stresses, however, is the need to maintain balance between involvement and detachment.

Gillespie's methods of research incorporate elements of what are described as principles of feminist research methodologies – in that the research is qualitative, feminist and most importantly, reflexive (Oakley 1981;



Schwartz and Jacobs 1979; Abbott and Wallace 1990; Stanley and Wise 1990). Reflexivity in feminist methodologies has been described as based in emotional and personal involvement because the researcher must and does identify with the women she is researching. Reflexivity requires the researcher to be aware of his/her values, attitudes and perceptions as influencing the research process, from the formation of the research questions, through the data collection stage, to the ways in which the data are analysed and theoretically explained (Abbott and Wallace 1990:27).

The notion of reflexivity as a feminist perspective however is greatly debated. For example, the argument forwarded by Dorothy Smith (1987) that feminist research should never lose sight of women as actively constructing as well as interpreting the social processes and realities that constitute their everyday lives; or that the production of discourses and ideologies colonise the material realities of women's lives are seen to correspond with those of symbolic interactionism – a similarity arising from an insistence that actors are experts about their own worlds. In turn this approach has its roots in the term 'verstehen', which was employed by Max Weber to define his approach to the interpretive understanding of human agents and the meaning they themselves attach to their actions. My research lies precisely in understanding individual's scope of agency and the role of constraints that govern the formation of their identities, through the use of reflexivity.

Within my research I examine the extent to which factors such as gender and religion may be differently weighted and take precedence over ethnicity, within my sample of young people. Often deeply embedded in cultural traditions, factors such as these are seen to particularly influence young people's subjectivity and identity. Jessica Jacobson's (1998) research, aimed at understanding the conditions of the survival and revival of religious tradition in modern society, by looking specifically at 'second generation' British Pakistanis in a London borough, has provided me with a further insight into qualitative research and the benefits of interviews. Her research based on qualitative methods, was felt to be most appropriate for 'acquiring an insight into the subtle and complex meanings held by social actors' (1998:47). In-depth semi-structured interviewing is the central element because the primary concept of 'identity', which is under investigation, requires the subjects to explicitly define how they belong in groups and the positions they hold. With 'identity' regarded as an abstract concept, Jacobson believes that along with enquiring about attitudes and values in the research interviews, it is useful to ask about patterns of behaviour and past experiences. Her particular style of questionnaire, divided into three sections under different themes and questions was a useful model around which I constructed my own. Alongside the interviews, Jacobson engaged in supplementary fieldwork which she felt would give her a better understanding into the extent to which the 'identity' described in the formal interviews related to concrete patterns of social life in the

community. This involved building up an extended network of contacts in the local area, ranging from the borough's race relations unit, social service, youth service and a number of the Asian community organisations - an approach that I used in the initial stages of my own research, however, could not use in any great depth, because of my choice of a multi-ethnic group, based in no specific area of London.

With my focus, first and foremost on individual identities, I have also found the informal, group discussions unsuitable for my research focus. Within a group setting, the dynamics of a group can heavily influence the debates and discussions, with dominant characters imposing their will and opinions, which can give rise to data, which is biased or misrepresented. Research conducted by Chris Barker (1998) on in four Birmingham schools, with twenty groups of 14-15 year old British Asian schoolgirls, was structured around these young people talking about soaps within friendship groups, without an adult present. These self-selected groups, which were all same-sex, apart from one, were given a tape-recorder and asked to have a discussion on soap opera, at a time and place of their choosing. The aim of this was largely to promote a freedom of discussion away from the pressures of having an adult presence. Barker found the research method successfully confirmed the methodological supposition that discussions free of adult mediation are more likely to get closer to young people's perceptions and uses of television. The drawbacks, however, also acknowledged by Barker, are the very reasons I chose to



steer away from such an unstructured approach with my participants.

Firstly, it was found that on some occasions the tone was contrived and participants were playing up to the presence of the tape-recorder. The other drawback was the tendency of consensual group talk, which may have contributed to consensual gender stereotyping.

Within mass communication and cultural studies research, a number of methodologies have been used over the years to understand television and its audiences. Today the audience is seen as 'a discursive trope signifying the constantly shifting and radically heterogeneous ways in which meaning is constructed and contested in multiple everyday contexts of media use and consumption' (Ang 1996:4). Viewers of media are not regarded as passive recipients of prescribed media messages, but people that actively read and construct their own interpretations and messages (McRobbie 1991; Kaplan 1992; MacBeth 1996). In part, guided by audience reception analysis, my study focuses on the relationships between active viewers and media texts, and the fact that media texts acquire meaning as they are viewed, or at the moment of reception, and that audiences actively produce meaning from media by decoding and interpreting such texts from their particular social and cultural positions (Kaplan 1992; Tuchman 1994; Kellner 1995; Macbeth 1996). What I intend is not only to reach a better understanding of my audience sample but also the programmes or texts they constantly refer to in their interviews. Why do these programmes in particular warrant more comments than others?

Some empirical quantitative surveys into television and ethnic minorities, their viewing habits and representation on the small screen, conducted over the last decade, have also informed the basis of this research in terms of their findings. In one survey, the Broadcasting Standards Council (1992) observed the ways in which other groups in society viewed ethnic minorities on television, using a two-stage methodology consisting of research clinics followed up by a telephone survey. The first method allowed a discussion of a range of issues using both qualitative and quantitative techniques. Respondents took part in a number of exercises ranging from shuffle cards to semi-structured open-ended questioning and group discussions. The interviews questioned people's views and knowledge of ethnic minorities and the extent to which they were influenced by television. Specific programmes were also viewed and discussions were held about the manner in which the ethnic minority characters were treated in them. Further questions were also asked about minority programmes in particular, on immigrant populations and immigration in general. Although the methods are completely quantitative, I believe the findings may prove useful in further understanding the reactions of my own interviewees to certain representations on television.

In May 1999, the Asian satellite station Zee TV, commissioned qualitative audience research through NOP Consumer consisting of focus group discussions. What emerged from the groups of 25–40 year old viewers was

how they clearly identified with the channel, calling it 'their own' and praising it for successfully providing high quality programming for the Asian community in Britain. The group labelled the channel as the definitive 'friend from back home' and saw its spectrum of programming as being 'in tune with Asian/Indian modernity and trends'. This empirical research is useful in that it highlights how important niche programming is for some young ethnic minority audiences in Britain, maintaining links with the diaspora and their culture and traditions. Within my own sample, I shall attempt to discover the popularity and worth attached to such programming and television channels.

What I want to examine is the heterogeneity of audiences and how the viewer relates to different televisual texts, especially since the move away from the deterministic approach of television, as a controlling medium. The abovementioned quantitative studies and research provide a context within which to compare my sample of young people, talking about their own experience of television viewing. My aim is to gain an insight into the relationship between ethnic minority young people and television, and determine how relevant one's ethnicity is in its watching and enjoyment and, more importantly, to gauge how significant television might be in influencing diasporic identities. These data provide me with a comparative framework within which to work. Having reviewed some of the methodological approaches available to my research and noted the



most relevant methods of past research, within the following pages of this chapter I shall identify and elaborate on my own choice of methods.

## Sampling

My interview sample consists of young people from a variety of different cultural backgrounds that fall within the 'Asian', 'African' and 'African-Caribbean' categories. As mentioned earlier, this has been divided into two age groups or 'generations' of 'youth' – one at the start of the 'youth' category, aged between 16–21 and the other in their late 20s - early 30s. The definition of 'youth' is always problematic but this thesis has been built on the premise that in today's society, the youth 'lifestyle' is a category that is constantly expanding (Miles 2000). The changes, although determined largely by a number of social factors, are exploited by the media and consumer market, which categorise the youth market as falling between the ages of 16–34; a target group with fewer financial commitments and responsibilities and a greater disposable income than many other age categories. I have largely based my 'youth' sample on these marketing and media constructions of the youth category.

In part 'youth' is a more challenging category to explore because of the fluidity within it, in terms of the ever-changing identities of the young people, who are trying to find the most important aspects of their lives

around which to build themselves. Far from being an immutably fixed and timeless stage in human physical and psychological development, the nature of youth varies enormously across time and cultures (Osgerby 1998). Another view suggests that all young people are not avant-garde innovators but incredibly conservative and keen to maintain habits and routines, possibly because they have such an enormous need for some sort of security when both they themselves and the world around them are in a state of enigmatic flux. It is at this stage that some become conventional and others straightforward fundamentalists (Fornas 1995:2). What interests me are the moments at which the identity begins to stabilise; what are these key-turning points in one's youth that cause one to take stock of one's roots and culture? When do they occur, and why? Are those at the younger end of the spectrum more likely to exhibit fluidity, and are the older ones more fixed and immutable in their attitudes?

Prior to finding respondents for my sample, I road tested my ideas and the general direction of my research through extensive networking. With the initial help of local community and religious groups, I attended a number of wedding receptions, parties and religious ceremonies held by a variety of ethnic minority groups, over a period of five months, in the summer of 1998. As one of the guests, I was able to mingle with the other young people at the gatherings and engage them in casual conversations around questions of identity, ethnicity and television viewing. These were easy subjects to get colourful, and often heated, discussions going. These social

settings also allowed me ample opportunities to observe the ways in which young people related to their cultural practices, in terms of dress, religion, music and language. Insights were also provided into the family hierarchies, and the influence of family on their behaviour. On a number of occasions I bumped into the same young people but within different social settings, and started noticing significant differences in their behaviour. For example, at parties amongst their peers, many young people behaved far differently from when their parents were around. This, however, was more the case in the younger age grouping and less so with those in the older group. After several months of this level of participant observation, I was able to formulate more substantive key questions for my final questionnaire, based around my experiences of social and cultural dimensions of second and third generation youth living in London.

The next phase consisted of a few informal group discussions – amongst both family members and groups of friends, and some of their friends and family. The purpose of these gatherings, which were held either within the home or at bars and pubs, was to test some of my initial questions that I had formulated around identity, the importance of roots and ethnicity and one's expectations of television as ethnic minority viewers/audiences.

These discussions were not recorded in order to encourage the spontaneity of answers. From many of the responses, I was able to judge which areas would give rise to the most rich debate and discussion, and which areas



needed further development. What clearly emerged was that young people in their late twenties and early thirties seem far more settled on the issue of their identity, and many even admit to the changes that they have noticed in themselves, from their teenage years to the present.

The final phase, before embarking on the interviews, revolved around the final construction of my interview questions and the sourcing of an eclectic sample from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. I felt the diversity of young people, paired with an age factor, would add a fundamentally new dimension to past research into the areas of youth and ethnicity. My method of selection for the younger interviewees in my sample was in part dependent on my friends, who teach at inner-London Sixth Form colleges. They made it possible for me to gain access to some of their students. All of my interviews were conducted between 1998 and 2000.

One of the colleges based in Islington has a very diverse ethnic mix of students and hence was able to provide a rich tapestry of different cultural backgrounds. I met with a number of 16–17 year olds in their tutor groups and briefly outlined my research, requesting that any students who were willing to be interviewed should come forward. I was pleasantly surprised with the numbers that volunteered. The only drawback was that not many young men were willing to participate, and this lack of male participants in the sample initially perturbed me. On contemplation, however, I felt that this might allow me to concentrate more fully on my chosen areas of

age and ethnicity with the added dimension of gender, particularly in relation to the numbers of young females in the sample. The second college, which was based in Twickenham, also had a good ethnic minority mix, particularly of Asian population since many of the students came from nearby Southall and Hounslow. My contact at the college posted a note in the common room and those interested were asked to get in touch with my source. He, in turn, arranged for me to meet them and select appropriate participants. In this case, all the interviewees landed up being female. I selected those volunteers that I felt best fitted my criteria, in terms of age, ethnic grouping, background, or what I saw of them. All the interviews were conducted on the respective campuses and were taped. Although all interviews have been transcribed, I have returned to the data in original form, on a number of occasions.

Finding people for the other half of the sample, aged between late 20s and early 30s, was easier in some respects, in that I had many different means of finding participants. A number of them were selected through informal social networks, provided either by my family or friends. After a brief conversation or meeting, I decided if they were appropriate or not. I also attended a kung fu/martial arts class, which had a good ethnic mix in the hopes of gaining a few more interviewees, but this proved a futile exercise. Other sources were people I met at parties and social gatherings, who showed interest in my research. I deliberately chose to limit the size of the sample in order to be able to extract the most from those that I did select,

however, I had hoped for a total of twenty interviewees but some difficulties in finding the right people towards the end, meant that I had to work with fifteen in the final analysis, due to the time factor.

My main emphasis, when choosing the sample, has been on attaining as diverse and eclectic a mix of people from the three categories I have decided to focus on – ‘Asian’, ‘African’ and ‘African-Caribbean’. Under the category of ‘Asian’ for example, the interviewees are of Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, Chinese and Vietnamese backgrounds; and under the ‘African’ and ‘African-Caribbean’ umbrella grouping, they originate from Nigeria, Eritrea, Ghana and St Lucia and Guyana respectively. I feel the strength of my research lies in the diversity of the sample, which has allowed me to explore aspects of different cultural backgrounds, and examine the ways in which my interviewees respond to a variety of questions about their race and ethnicity and roots. Some of my key aims are to determine any similarities in the responses and to note whether certain backgrounds produced more essentialist or assimilationist responses. I use a continuum that covers a spectrum of different approaches to identity ranging from the more essentialist or a kind of ethnic absolutism to a more anti-essentialist stance at the other end, with hybridity in between.

The variety in terms of cultural backgrounds has been a conscious decision because many past ethnographic studies have largely focused either on



age, gender, 'race' and 'ethnicity', within specific youth groups. My aim is to primarily focus on individual constructions of identity, however, I also wish to draw on degrees of difference between the various ethnic groups, particularly focusing on age differences. Amongst some groups, ethnicity may be seen as a major determinant in their identity and consequently more influential in the way in which they watch television. As Gillespie states in her research 'young people are encouraged to compare, contrast and criticise the cultural and social forms represented to them by their parents, by significant others present in their daily lives and by significant others on screen. This is the kind of context in which the construction of new ethnic identities becomes both an inevitable consequence and a necessary task' (Gillespie 1995:206). The post-modern era has often been distinguished from previous ones by the proliferation of communication through the mass media, particularly television. And it has been argued that activities of consumption now play a larger role in defining people's identities and consciousness than class (Baudrillard 1988).

My interviews with the younger interviewees have been conducted, bearing in mind that adolescents are seen as in a transitional period of life. It is maintained that as age decreases in importance as a means of differentiating oneself, other dimensions of cultural differentiation become more pronounced, for example, gender, class and race. These dimensions, more particularly race and ethnicity, are what I have tried to explore in my interviews, through building up a good rapport with my respondents.

What needs to be stressed however is that due to the size of the sample, the conclusions reached are in no way representative of any particular group, but more an indication of similarities and differences in terms of age and generation. Although this qualitative research limits my ability to generalize, it will be compensated for by intensified interpretation.

## **Interviews and Data Gathering**

Today, we are described as living in an 'interview society', with much of the information today, in all walks of work and life, derived via interviews (Silverman 1993). It is seen as a universal mode of systematic inquiry that provides a rich insight into people's attitudes, opinions, beliefs and aspirations (Hyman et al 1975). A number of different types of interviews exist, ranging from the structured, semi-structured, unstructured interviews to group interviews. Unlike the precise uniformity of structured interviews and the neutrality of the interviewer's role within, I have chosen the route of the semi-structured interview. Questions are normally specified but the interviewer can probe beyond the answers for both clarification and elaboration of the topics (May 2001). 'Probing' is defined as 'encouraging the respondent to give an answer, or to clarify or amplify an answer' (Hoinville et al. 1987: 101). The context of the interview is an important aspect of the process in the nature of the interview and the

way in which the questions were asked. I am aware that this choice, on occasions, can appear prejudicial to the aims of standardization and comparability.

A number of differing views exist about the role of interviews as providing reliable and valid information. Some argue that interviews fundamentally, not incidentally shape the form and content of what is said, and others suggest that interviews virtually impose ways of understanding reality on subjects' responses (Cicourel 1964, 1974; Briggs 1986). Another argument is that all interviews are interpretively active, implicating meaning-making practices on the part of both interviewers and interviewees. To some extent, this perspective of the interview, influenced by ethnomethodology, is the one I embrace when conducting my research. Interviews are traditionally analysed as more or less accurate representations of reality, and respondents' interpretive activity is reduced to what they say, namely 'the whats of experience overwhelm the hows' (Gubrium and Holstein 1997). With active interview, data analysis seeks to show the interrelatedness of the 'whats' and the 'hows'. The analytic objective is seen not merely to describe the talk but to show how what is being said relates to the experience and lives being studied.

When interviewing the younger participants, I was very conscious of my role as interviewer and the way I might be perceived, particularly in terms of age and ethnicity. Miller and Glassner (1997), based on their own



research, point out that the meaning systems of adolescents differ from adults, and therefore adult researchers need to exercise caution when assuming they have an understanding of adolescent cultures because they have 'been there'. They also point out that these adolescents are in a transitional period of life, becoming more oriented towards adulthood, though with 'rough edges' (Fine and Sandstrom 1988: 60). As a consequence 'age begins to decrease in importance as a means of differentiating oneself, and other dimensions of cultural differentiation, such as gender and class [and race] become more crucial' (ibid.,1988: 66). I did find in some cases that I needed to show I was still aware of popular culture, in terms of music, fashion and television - that I understood 'where they were coming from'. In most cases, however, I felt they were at ease with me and often found my being female and of an ethnic minority an advantage, partly because many of the younger interviewees were female. These dimensions are seen as of critical importance in establishing research relationships, rapport and trust, and in evaluating both the information obtained, and the interaction that occurs, within in-depth interviews. In the case of the few interviewees who were shy or ill at ease, this is reflected in their answers and length of the interview, compared to other more confident respondents.

My reasoning behind semi-structured, face-to-face interviews is that with myself present as the interviewer, I should be able to read beyond any contrived answers, and gain some additional information through any

non-verbal communication as well. Conducting one-to-one interviews allows more control over the direction and flow of a conversation.

Gillespie (1995) suggests the need to be aware of commonsense categories and dichotomies influencing the structure of one's data, and how one needs an awareness of the way in which key words and categories are used by respondents e.g. when talking about culture, community, tradition. The use of verbatim quotes within research findings is also an informative approach, that I have used, whereby the young people's voices are allowed to speak as much as possible, to give an insight into their experiences and perceptions and to allow further interpretations.

Within the interviewing process, tensions exist between subjectivity and objectivity. On the one hand it is felt that interviews are free of bias and prejudice; on the other it is believed that a degree of self-consciousness must exist in order for the interview to flow. As Miller and Glassner suggest: 'Those of us who aim to understand and document others' understandings choose qualitative interviewing because it provides us with a means for exploring the points of view of our research subjects, while granting these points of view the culturally honoured status of reality' (1997: 100). In terms of my research, I embrace the notion that there is a need to establish an inter-subjective understanding between the interviewer and interviewee, at the same time as pursuing objectivity, in order to socially situate the responses.

The decision to use face-to-face semi-structured interviews with a relatively small, but eclectic sample of interviewees, emanates from my desire to be able to establish a good rapport with my sample of respondents. I feel semi-structured interviews carried out on a one-to-one basis, where a reasonable degree of informality is maintained, allows a sufficient build up of rapport, which is understood as the development of a mutual trust 'that allows for the free flow of information' (Spradley 1979: 78). This establishment of rapport has been described in terms of four stages, starting with the descriptive questions that get the interviewees talking, to break the ice. This is followed by exploration, where each party gets to know about the other, and how the interview will proceed and for what purpose. The third and fourth stages are cooperation, where the parties know what to expect of each other, and participation is where the respondent accepts the interviewer and actively takes on an assertive participant role (Spradley 1979: pp.82-83).

Drawing on mutually familiar events, experiences or outlooks not only secures rapport or 'communion' but fixes the conversation on particular horizons of meaning or narrative connections, encouraging the respondent to elaborate (Gubrium and Holstein, 1985; Douglas, 1985). How interviewees respond to us on the basis of what role we play in their lives, as well as the social categories we belong to such as age, gender, race and class, is seen as a practical as well as epistemological or theoretical concern (Miller and Glassner, 1997). I have an awareness of the cultural and



ethnographic backgrounds within which the interviews are embedded and therefore try to bring my shared experience and sensitivity to the interview situation, in the hope of building better rapport with my respondents.

When conducting my interviews, the semi-structured interview format will help me successfully address some of the key questions, in the three particular areas that I need to explore – their backgrounds and general information about themselves, questions specifically about their television consumption and questions focusing on their identities and second and third generation status. Without some structure, I feel it will be impossible to gain a uniformity of information, which will then greatly minimise my chances of drawing any comparisons between the various interviewees, age groups or ethnic groupings. By ordering the questions in a particular way, I am able to maximize the degree of cooperation and rapport that I want to achieve with the interviewees. Initial introductory questions on one's age, name, profession and education are used as relatively relaxed questions for my interviewees and in many cases to act as 'ice-breakers'. The next section, in which I question them about their television consumption, should give rise to a more enthusiastic flow of 'TV talk' and vociferous opinions on how certain programmes or characters needed improving. Questions such as 'Do you have a favourite programme?' and 'Are there any characters on television you dislike?' will be used to lead into interesting debates around race representation on television. This

stage of the interview is designed to act as a precursor to the next section, which delves into more personal matters relating to their identity, family, marriage, relationships and multiculturalism. Questions like 'Do you follow a religion? How important is it to your lifestyle?' and 'What are your views on interracial marriage?' are particularly relevant and revealing in terms of exploring my continuum. The cross-section of areas covered in the interviews will reveal the ambivalence and the difficulties of finding consistency within a single person (see Appendix III for Interview Questionnaire).

My choice of an age spectrum in the category of 'youth' is as a result of witnessing differences amongst family, friends and within myself; as one grows older there seems to be a greater need to establish a more concrete sense of identity. There is a point at which 'fitting in' with peers or the dominant culture may not be enough, and it is about establishing a deeper sense of 'being' and 'belonging' – of acknowledging the past, present and future together, particularly the important influence of the past on the present and the future. Of particular interest is the marked difference that exists between today's society and the society that the parents of young people of second and third generations, migrated to thirty or forty years ago. In the 1950s and 1960s, this 'first-generation' of migrants existed in a society that ostracised and discriminated against them, forcing them to integrate, or else suffer even greater prejudice. The result was that in many cases, the cultural traditions and lifestyles were confined to the home.

Their children, known more widely as 'second generation' have often been cited as 'between two cultures', namely, in a quandary about their identities; neither one nor the other. By the late 1970s and 1980s, however, there was a move amongst this younger group towards rebelling against a status quo in which they were discriminated against despite their birthrights.

In the 1990s the emergence of a 'new confidence' is something that has excited me into thinking about this as an aspect of the research. Whereas for decades the emphasis has been on integration and assimilation, these 'second' and 'third' generation youth are able to openly embrace their 'difference', especially Asian youth who have remained more 'foreign' for longer, than their African and African-Caribbean counterparts who are now well established as leaders in street-style and popular culture. By embracing their label of 'difference' many show the dominant culture that they actually prefer their cultural differences to the indigenous culture – often 'choosing' to make the distinction between the 'Western' culture and their own 'other' culture.

'Second generation' refers to those young people born here whose parents were first generation immigrants to Britain, and 'third generation' refers to those whose grandparents migrated here, and their own parents were still children, or were born in Britain. Some may argue that calling young people born and bred in Britain, 'second or third generation' emphasises



the immigrant aspect and undermines their status in this country. I would however, argue that in the case of the diasporic sample that I have chosen, being second or third generation, of parents from a different country of origin, impacts on their existence, on a multiplicity of levels. In keeping with my thesis, the use of the term 'second' and 'third generation' is a helpful way of categorizing my groupings of youth, in order to understand changes, particularly in relation to past generations that may affect their identity formation.

## **Analysis of Data**

Much has been made of the process of analysis and how we explore and interpret qualitative data, suggesting three types of methods – description, analysis and interpretation. Generally, it is not envisaged that all the methods will be used in totality in all research cases. The transformation of data can take place at any of the three levels, or in any combination (Wolcott, 1994). In the case of my thesis, my emphasis, will rest more on the analysis and interpretation of the interview data – an analysis which will involve using a systematic procedure to search for certain themes and patterns from the interview data, and an interpretation that transcends factual data and cautious analysis, and begins to probe into what is to be made of them (ibid: 1994). In some ways, this process started at the time I constructed my choice of questions and the sequence they would follow –

it fed into the research collection and design. By contrast with 'analysis' that is seen as structured, formal, systematic, grounded, methodical, particular and impassive, there is a suggestion that 'interpretation' is more freewheeling, casual, unbounded and aesthetically satisfying, idealistic, generative and impassioned (1994: 36). In my data analysis I have used progressive focusing towards developing concepts, explanations and theories. I use 'quotations' from the interviews in order to allow the respondents a voice and to develop and test concepts that I feel the data has generated or supported.

I intend to acknowledge the importance of reflexivity within the analysis of my data, by evidencing my own particular consciousness and reactions in relation to the interview process and the analysis. As Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson state: 'the construction of analytic notes and memos... constitutes precisely the sort of internal dialogue, or thinking aloud, that is the essence of reflexive ethnography... one is forced to question what one knows, how such knowledge has been acquired, the degree of certainty of such knowledge, and what further lines of inquiry are implied' (1995: 192). I shall at all times reflect upon my role as interviewer, including my reasons for particular interpretations of the data – as a woman, as belonging to an ethnic minority, as a second generation person. I shall show sensitivity to the flow of fact and fiction, to various nuances, and to the notion of meanings as political constructions. I am also

aware that interpretations are produced within cultural, historical and personal contexts, and are often shaped by the interpreters' values.

Reflexivity encourages the exploration of new, previously uncharted and marginalized terrains of the private and often hidden areas of feelings, memories, emotions and individual experiences, not only as substantive areas of enquiry but also as dimensions of the research process itself. It also alters the relationship between the researcher and the researched, with the latter having a clear awareness of their role as active participants in the generation of knowledge, often altering the status of the researcher from 'outsider' to 'insider' status or vice versa (Lyon and Busfield 1996).

When transcribing it becomes particularly important to acknowledge that the printed text, although it allows a closer inspection of what was spoken, may produce interpretations that are at odds with the speaker's intent.

Things can be taken out of context, and this is what I hope to avoid through reflexive interpretation. I would like to keep my analysis very much centred on situations and contexts to which my respondents respond.

The distinct advantage of the interview is being able to gain additional information through 'probing' i.e. the initial responses can be explored and all the questions can be responded to without loss. This gives richness to the data, allowing many individual differences in opinion and reasoning to be uncovered (Keats, 2000). I am however, aware that any



research will contain politics underlying methods, topics and assumptions that need to be analysed directly and self-consciously, rather than remaining unacknowledged. For example, when conducting interviews, I am aware that the questions asked, the paths of discussion respondents are led down, and decisions about which issues are followed up and which are ignored are governed by one's own personal politics. In analyzing data, we are ultimately confronted with ourselves, and our central role in governing the outcome.

Having outlined my choice of methods and analysis, in the following Part II (Chapters Four and Five) of this thesis, I shall engage in the process of analysis of my interview data, in order to reach an understanding of identity and belonging in second and third generation youth of the diaspora. In order to obtain short profiles of my sample of young respondents, who are discussed in some detail in the next Part of the thesis, please refer to Appendix IV.

# **PART II**

**INTERVIEWS WITH LONDON**

**‘YOUTH’ OF BLACK AND ASIAN**

**DIASPORAS**

## **Chapter Four**

# **INTERPRETING CULTURAL 'OTHERNESS' ON TV: STEREOTYPES AND 'CULTURAL AUTHENTICS'**

Living in an increasingly media saturated culture, requires audiences to be active (as choosers and readers, pleasure seekers and interpreters) in order to produce any meaning at all out of the overdose of images thrown before them (Ang 1996). Postmodern consumer culture requires people to be semiotically skilled, more sophisticated or educated in their meaning-making abilities (ibid:13). Different audiences engage with televisual texts on different levels, with factors other than textual ones playing a role in the way that viewers make sense of a text (Hall 1980; Morley 1980, 1981; Brunsdon 1981). This engagement with television representations and programmes provides a crucial dimension to the understanding of ethnic identities. It is possible to derive valuable and meaningful insights from the television consumption of media audiences, based on both their 'collective' experiences and



memberships of groups, as well as through individual experiences, which influence assumptions about their social worlds (Ross 2000).

Debates surround the need to destroy the myth of a homogeneous 'black' community and to focus on the diverse and multiple identifications that exist; to bring about 'the end of the innocent notion of the essential black subject' (Hall 1987). The media in part, can be held responsible for creating the stereotyped and pariah status of ethnic minority groups in society, by continuously portraying them as 'other' or 'different'. In recent times however, certain media such as television have been making concerted efforts to provide better representations of minority peoples in Britain, through more realistic portrayals. Mainstream programming has created a greater variety of ethnic minority characters that previously would only have appeared in specific genres. Endeavours have been made to highlight the heterogeneity of ethnic minorities, both in terms of representations and audiences, and my interest lies in discovering whether my interviewees note or applaud any significant changes.

In keeping with other constructions of continuum, surrounding different types of ethnicities and identity (Pieterse 1997; Barker 1997), I have attempted to analyse my interviewees' relationship with their ethnic and cultural backgrounds and television through a typology of diasporic identities, on a continuum. These range from the anti-essentialist or assimilationist types, to hybrid cosmopolitans, to those of a more essentialist nature, often driven by

political and religious beliefs. I feel a good illustration of my typology can be given with the help of some of the regular stereotypical Asian characters within the BBC2 comedy series **Goodness Gracious Me**, broadcast in the late 1990s, around the time of my research. The show, which features an all-Asian cast, is both written and directed by second-generation Asians. The typology I use picks up some of the exaggerated characterizations that they use for comedy purposes. For example, the two couples constantly competing to appear more English than the other could represent the assimilationist types – who are shown as so eager to integrate within the indigenous population, that they are totally willing to reject all their own culture and beliefs. The two young ‘Bhangramuffins’, as they are described, are more representative of cultural hybridity – a merging of Asian, Black and white youth culture, from the clothes they wear, the way they talk and their general mannerisms. The older male character, who constantly states that everything ‘is Indian’, could be seen as representative of someone who exhibits a kind of essentialist cultural pride or even arrogance. These categories, like the characters, however, are caricatures - larger than life, and more or less empirically non-existent. In reality, none of the interviewees are likely to fit only one definite category since there is a great deal of ambiguity and ambivalence in identities, which will make it almost impossible to plot them in a single place on the continuum. This continuum, however, offers a useful framework for exploring the negotiation of positions and boundaries that takes place.

It is useful in the exploration of different criteria that come in to play when different interviewees talk about programmes they watch. For instance, would someone who exhibits greater degrees of cultural essentialism, have different expectations of ethnic representations compared to another more assimilated member of the sample. Particular programmes are frequently cited and discussed during the interviews, and these are drawn on within this chapter. My aim is not to conduct audience research but to instead concentrate on the subjectivities that influence viewers on a more individual level, and to gain an insight into how they interact with representations of ethnicity and multiculturalism on the small screen.

By employing reflexivity in these analysis chapters, I hope to gain a deeper understanding of my sample, and some of the key similarities and differences that exist between them. Many of the youth in this sample, and other second and third generation youth of the diaspora, often end up contesting their identities, by constantly repositioning themselves according to the context and circumstances of the situations within which they find themselves. In some cases, they choose to downplay their ethnicity and emphasize their 'Britishness' in order to assimilate; in part, as a defence mechanism against hostility and alienation. In other circumstances where they feel there is less of a threat, they may prefer to highlight their 'ethnic difference', using a kind of 'strategic essentialism' over their being British; enhancing an aspect of their identity that they are sometimes more comfortable with, or feel more accepted and secure within (Spivak 1990). It is all about creating a sense of belonging,



dependent on circumstances within which they find themselves - of being 'situational' or sometimes even 'situated'.

At all times, when interviewing these young people, I try to show awareness of the effect my presence may have had on the way they interpreted the questions and on the answers they have chosen to give. My being female, Asian, in some cases older, and in others, a total stranger has to have affected the way they perceived me as interviewer. I also attempt to keep in mind the fact that the formative conditions of my own youth and upbringing may have played a major role in the questions asked and my way of understanding their answers. Discussions of issues pertaining to race, ethnicity, gender, politics, religion, family and class, are all unconsciously subject to my own experiences and interpretations. The choice of interviewees too, is ultimately a reflection of my personal choice, in terms of the suitability of respondents for the direction of my research. This evaluation is in part my admittance that no object or subject of study can ever be studied entirely objectively. (See Appendix IV for brief biopics of the interviewees).

Dialogues about television programmes, being broadcast at the time of my research provide further insight into the identities of the interviewees, illustrating how individuals locate themselves and are located by those in power, controlling the systems of representation. As Hall suggests (1989) identity is constituted not outside but within representation. He refers to cinema constituting us as new kinds of subjects – something that I feel applies

to television as well. How, as ethnic minority audiences, do they make sense of their experiences, when watching programmes? Do they see 'a racialized regime of representation'? And how far does the social, political and historical context of the period affect their interpretation of programmes?

The term 'stereotype' often gets used in relation to the representation of ethnic minorities on television and in the media. Stereotyping is all to do with the representation and categorisation of people; a way of making sense of a society through generalities, patternings and 'typifications' (Dyer 1993:12). A distinction has been made between 'social types' and 'stereotypes', that is very useful in the understanding of representations in the world. 'Stereotypes' are representations of those who do not belong, or are outside of one's society; and 'social types' are the kinds of people one expects to find in one's society (Klapp 1962). It is maintained, however, that the effective usage of stereotypes, lies in their ability to invoke a consensus; to express a general agreement about a social group. The consensus invoked by the stereotype is more apparent than real; they express particular definitions of reality, with concomitant evaluations, which in turn relate to the disposition of power within society. Who proposes the stereotype, and who has the power to enforce it, is the crux of the matter (Dyer 1993:14). Whereas social types are used in more flexible and explicit ways, stereotypes always carry within their very representation an implicit narrative, which is often negative. The use of stereotypes and stereotyping in relation to ethnic minority representation on

television, particularly within the popular genre of soap operas, was one of the main points of discussion, which I shall explore in the next section.

## Soap Operas

Increasingly, soap operas have become the most popular genre of programme on television, with many people regarding them as their staple diet in their television consumption. Part of the reason for their popularity lies in their dealing with the everyday and mundane life situations within their storylines, using a cross-section of society from different walks of life. Soaps, particularly like *EastEnders*, set in the East End of London, have from their inception tried to introduce a variety of ethnic characters and this has attracted a strong ethnic minority audience, from across the board. One of the most significant facts about the black characters in *EastEnders*, as pointed out by David Buckingham (1987) is that they simply exist, compared with other British soaps, and indeed, with much British television in general. On the other hand, the soap has been accused of reproducing a limited range of racial stereotypes, over the years. *EastEnders* is frequently cited as a favourite programme, by several members of the sample, who initially applaud it for its 'realistic' nature, however, in more in-depth discussions about the themes and characters, they reveal themselves to be highly critical of the representations and the roles played by ethnic minorities in the soap. Some of the major concerns that are reiterated are those that have been cited before - racial and ethnic stereotyping, marginality of black minority characters, the dominance



of themes relating to race-crimes, cross-cultural relationships and the resulting impact of these negative images on both white and black audiences (Ross 2000).

Most of my interviewees, when discussing the representations of ethnic minorities in *EastEnders*, are critical of the non-white characters as being rather uninspired, under-developed characters. Specific characters are mentioned that are seen to be an embarrassment to their respective cultures, with many of the African and African-Caribbean interviewees choosing Black characters they find negative, and Asian interviewees focusing on Asian characters. This can largely be explained in terms of the lack of non-white images generally, leading to more pressure on those that do appear to create a good impression for the audiences at large. The relative absence of media representations and opportunities is seen to put 'the burden of representation' on the few actors/characters and programmes that do exist (Ross 1996).

Following through this notion of stereotyping, most of the African and African-Caribbean interviewees found a particular black character in *EastEnders* annoying. The protagonist, a young black man, Alan, who lived with his white wife and her many children, all fathered by different men, was not seen to present black men in a favourable light. Much of his time on screen shows him at the beck and call of his wife, since most of the time he is out of work. He is seen to be a weak character, who serves no other purpose, than to create a picture in people's minds, of his worthlessness as a man, or

more particularly, as a black man. Raliat states: *I don't like Alan's character at all. Sometimes I find him a bit embarrassing to watch.... he is like a no-hoper, a loser basically.* Here Raliat suggests the need for positive representations and not those that reflect badly on the black community, when watched by the majority population. Research in the 1980s found that three black stereotypes, which characterized black media portraits – troublemaker, entertainer and dependant, still had currency in terms of television images. Even if changes seem to have occurred, there are still felt to be underlying traces of these stereotypes (Barry 1988). In this case, Alan is seen to be an unemployed lay-about, who does not contribute in any way to society.

Alan, as a cultural hybrid, is a source of irritation for Shirley. She does not feel the representation works, simply because Alan appears to have a foot in each camp - not truly black or white, and therefore, in her eyes, has no real roots anywhere. She feels it necessary to be able to place or 'situate' him. She highlights her belief in a kind of essence of 'blackness' - black characters need to have more fixed identities, and not simply a fluidity, that may exist in real life. She states: *I didn't really like his character because he'd be, I don't know, he was like, how can I say it? He was sort of like 'I'm black', but then again 'I'm white' sort of thing. I mean he'd be sitting there saying 'y'know what I mean', sort of, and then afterwards he'd suck his teeth – sucking his teeth, that is a typically black sort of thing, he'd be sort of white and then he'd be black.*

Shirley's criticism of soaps is reminiscent of past findings that have found that viewers often believe that writers of series simply have no idea about the lives of black minorities, and even less interest in finding out. Viewers often found that attention to detail was missing, for example, a Hindu shown praying in a mosque. Although, this may be seen as a small inaccuracy and possibly go unnoticed by white viewers - amongst black minority viewers, it signals a disregard and disrespect for cultural veracity, which in turn reflects the low value attached to the portrayal of authentic and credible black minority characters (Ross 2000: 141). Shirley draws attention to another soap, *Family Affairs*, to highlight the characterization of one of the black female characters:

*I don't know I just can't stand her. It's her - you don't know what her nationality is. One minute she's got a Jamaican accent, then it turns to African, then it turns into a Manchester accent, then a Birmingham accent and then she's Cockney. I mean like, you are sitting there, and you're like, 'Where the hell does she come from?'.*

Shirley reiterates her belief in people knowing where they are from, placing or 'rooting' themselves. Although this may simply have been a case of poor acting, she is still keen that an actor/person has a specific nationality; one that the audience should be able to place or locate. She emphasizes their need to belong somewhere definite. This notion of 'situated belonging' is one demonstrated by Shirley's earlier suggestion when discussing Alan's identity; one needs to know one's roots in order to create a sense of belonging. Shirley's openness about what irritates her on television is particularly



insightful, since initially she appeared to be a little wary of my presence. Her candid 'TV talk' suggests a feeling of ease, and/or a way of indirectly voicing her belief in roots and the need for a definite link to a place of origin.

When discussing television, distinct aspects of Paul's identity also emerge – his race and ethnicity, masculinity, class and being a South Londoner. He sees the character, Alan, as giving black men a bad name:

*the media they try to make him out like some kind of idiot, you know what I mean? And on the whole everyone, or at least I know, that the average black man wouldn't stand for the rubbish that Alan stands for in EastEnders.*

Paul puts forward a pre-conceived notion of an 'essential black man', who would not, and should not be party to this kind of demeaning treatment. He does, however, in particular mean 'a black man in London', because when talking about the representation of a black character in the soap *Brookside*, which is set in Liverpool, his interpretation is completely different:

*They're from up north and I don't know how black people are from up North. It don't look like they're stereotyping him, but he is a bit soft at times, you know what I mean. Different lifestyles up there, y'know.*

Here the implication is that Black Londoners do not have much in common with Black people from the North West, who by his account are not as streetwise and cool as people in the South. In these statements, there is a clear

reminder of the fact that one cannot talk about a homogeneous black grouping, when talking about ethnic minorities in Britain. According to his own lived reality, Paul believes that most black men in London would not be the push-over as shown in the Alan character. Paul, in a way, would prefer the portrayal of the more assertive, aggressive black male. Alan, in his eyes, does not 'belong' to the cool Black Londoner grouping that Paul places himself within. The 'realism' in terms of settings and situations attracts Paul to *EastEnders*, however, at the same time he is extremely critical of the Black and Asian characters whom he feels are not portrayed realistically: *'they're just walked all over, they're stereotyped and like background actors'*. In this case, the realistic settings and real-life situations juxtaposed against the poor black representations, draw criticism.

One explanation for all the criticisms aimed at the soap is that because the black characters in *EastEnders* are made to represent whole groups, which are within themselves, extremely diverse. As a result, they may be read against a background of racist stereotypes which are constantly being reasserted in society at large, and which viewers inevitably bring to the programme. The crucial question then is not how 'realistic' the black characters in *EastEnders* are, but how the serial invites its viewers to make sense of questions of ethnicity – and in particular, how it defines ethnic difference (Buckingham 1987:101-2).

According to Raliat the ethnic representations in *EastEnders* are poor:

*Their non-white characters don't do anything. Their parts aren't that good and most of the time so far they have been stereotyped – you know, 'this is the way a black person is' and they go it from there.*

All three respondents, when discussing Alan, referred to the black/white dichotomy with an openness, which I feel they may not have done if the interviewer had been white. Shirley's annoyance with people not 'situating' their identities or acknowledging their roots, and Paul's references to what a real black man should act like, all point towards an unspoken understanding between myself as researcher and them as the researched. As someone of a minority ethnic background, it is assumed I will be able to understand their viewpoints about the need to belong somewhere.

One of the Muslim interviewees, Shelina, confesses that she is no longer a 'big fan' of the soap, *EastEnders* following the depiction of a Muslim family in the 1980s. She explains that before the more liberal Asian characters like Sanjay and Gita, they had a Muslim family, who were shown as quite orthodox and strict, especially the father towards the daughter:

*I think that was one reason, to be honest with you. I was a very regular EastEnders fan, and after that I think the family stopped watching, as a family, because I think we were genuinely offended that we were portrayed in that way.*



In this case, it was felt that the characters gave Islam a bad name by showing it as being too rigid and hence strengthening the stigma associated with being Muslim. In keeping with the rest of her answers throughout the interview, Shelina's religious upbringing is seen to have even penetrated her television viewing and expectations. Any seemingly anti-Muslim storylines or humour is therefore, interpreted as a dig at Islam and the Muslim world, especially when watched in a family setting, with a more sensitive older generation. I feel the directness with which Shelina voices her misgivings about the portrayal of Islam on television and the reactions of her family, emerge as a result of my being a fellow Asian, who she feels will understand her annoyance at such portrayals.

Many of the Asian interviewees are similarly critical of the Asian characters in soaps. In many of the comments, there is either clear criticism of the peripheral roles of the characters, or displeasure expressed about the lack of attention paid to cultural differences in characters' backgrounds and practices, which many regard to be disrespectful on the part of programme makers. This lack of attention to detail and cultural authenticity is continuously picked up on and criticised.

Raj claims to watch *EastEnders* mainly because his family members are regular viewers of the programme, and as a result claims to have no choice, but to watch it. Although he cannot pinpoint what he likes about it, he has clear views on Asian characters within the soap:

*Gita from EastEnders, I think really gets up my nose. I think she is completely characterless and she doesn't really have a proper role to play. I suppose Sanjay is your East End Jack-the Lad type of guy, so I suppose I can relate to him because I know some of my friends who are a bit like that. But Gita I find completely characterless, so yes, I dislike Gita.*

Raj reiterates the need for better representations and roles for Asian characters, and suggests that simply having minority characters on screen is not enough; they have to portray interesting characters. Having worked within the Asian media he expects better depictions of Asians on mainstream television.

Jasmeet is far more explicit about her expectations and criticisms of Asian representations in soaps. She maintains that soaps require more realistic and true-to-life portrayals of Asians, and if this means highlighting differences, and perhaps playing on stereotypes to do so, she would rather this, than have a misrepresentation of Asians, as totally assimilated into the British culture and way of life. Her constant usage of the word 'westernized' is indicative of her clear division between what she sees as being 'westernized' and what 'being an Indian in Britain' signifies for her. According to Jasmeet, **EastEnders** has storylines that are largely realistic, with good characterizations of ethnic minorities. She reaches this conclusion by comparing their representations with a soap opera like **Coronation Street**, which is set in Lancashire, and for many years has had no ethnic minority representation, whatsoever:

*In EastEnders they did have an Indian family. But they sort of like, went back to things like arranged marriages and things. But I suppose it was in the Eighties and that was a time when it was quite – sort of coming out, and everything. But in Coronation Street now they have got an Indian family as well. They're Indian but they are really westernized...*

Jasmeet's comments about the portrayal of the Indian family in **Coronation Street** is worthy of note in that she objects to the fact that the family are shown to integrate in with British society and 'dress in a 'Western' fashion, eat off nice china plates, and drink wine with their meal':

*They look westernized, very westernized, and I think it's a bit too westernized, and I'm sorry but I don't think Indians are really that westernized now. I think if you compare here to India, over there they are more westernized than we are. They are more into their 'I wanna be a white girl' kind of thing, and here it's stick to your culture and everything.*

Here the multiple usage of the word 'westernized' highlights what is seen as the overriding factor in the negative representation of the Asian family. To any other interviewer, the word used by Jasmeet would perhaps have less resonance than to another Asian. It is generally used to describe a person who has lost sight of their Eastern values and roots and exhibits far too much assimilation. Jasmeet believes that I fully comprehend the reasons behind her criticisms.



Within Jasmeet's circle of family and friends, the family within **Coronation Street**, live in an alien fashion, they are not proper Indians. They do not fit her perception of Indians in Britain. In many ways, this interviewee almost advocates the stereotype of 'Mr Patel running the corner shop with his wife in a sari behind the counter' as a more realistic portrayal of an Indian in Britain. She constantly enunciates binary oppositions – 'them' versus 'us', the 'West' vs the 'East'. In her mind there is no crossover, a crossover is in some way a betrayal of one's culture and roots. Being too 'Westernized is a negative, often implying loose morals, lack of respect for the family, and other cultural traditions and practices. For Jasmeet, a notion of cultural essence is vital for one's identity, a *raison d'être*, especially as an Asian in Britain.

Jasmeet comes from a background where the values of the first generation still prevail – values that left the Indian subcontinent years ago and have changed little over the decades. Although the 'homeland' may have altered considerably, the inhabitants of her Southall, a small part of Punjab circa 1960, live in a kind of moral time warp. Jasmeet is not interested in developing a hybrid or cosmopolitan identity, and instead holds onto a rooted native one, involved with the past and myths of origin. She exemplifies the notion of Asian identity associated with 'old men with beards', pre-modern and fixed (Banerjea 1996). The 'situational belonging' or fitting in with the cultural context, as depicted in **Coronation Street**, is seen as a loss of one's 'Eastern' identity. Like Shirley before, Jasmeet considers it vital that the characters need

to be 'situated', with a fixed cultural essence lying at the heart of their identity. She promotes the need for 'cultural authenticity'.

As past research has shown, Jasmeet uses the soap opera as a site for discussion either amongst friends or within the family. It is a point of contact, exploration and confirmation of values between British-born Asian youth and their parents (Gillespie 1995; Barker 1998). 'The juxtaposition of representations of very distinct cultural and social practices and different ways of life on television, is seen to encourage cross-cultural, comparative analyses of media representations. The ability to adopt a comparative and culturally relative perspective for interpreting different social worlds, is seen to further heighten an already well-developed sense of cultural consciousness in youth of the diaspora' (Gillespie, 2000:165). Soap operas are seen to form part of the multiplying global resources for the relativization and scrutiny of traditions. British, American and Australian soap operas present modern Western images of personal relationships, which may clash with the more established family morals and obligations of Indian-born parents of British-born children. Watching programmes like *EastEnders*, inadvertently provide Jasmeet with a greater sense of pride in her culture and traditions:

*When you watch EastEnders, you think like, I'm so lucky to have this, like, with our culture, it's like the family, that should be the most important thing, and so when you watch that and you compare it to yourself, you think 'oh, aren't we lucky. So the TV influenced me to sort of, be like closer to my family – and like sort of, don't do this and*

*don't do that, because this is the consequences and everything. So in that way it influences me, in a moral way.*

Again, Jasmeet uses television as a way of reinforcing her cultural superiority; she stresses that she is lucky to also be part of another culture, not just the white British culture, as shown on **EastEnders**. Her reference to 'our culture' again suggests she feels at ease talking to someone who she feels has 'inside knowledge'.

Priya, like several of the other Asian interviewees, objects to the fact that the characters are so far removed from the reality of the Asian communities in Britain. She maintains that reference to one's cultural practices and religion are vital for authenticity of characterization. Past research has identified that when the viewer is allowed a look into a 'black' character's home there is rarely the signification of something alluding to an African or Asian background. No ornament or decoration or picture, which suggests the personality of the incumbent, no signs of a provenance (or even contemporary reality) deriving from a place other than the normative cultural environment of 'white' Britain (Ross 2000). Priya is critical of the Asian characters, Sanjay and Gita in **EastEnders**, precisely for the reason that they do not give a realistic representation of an Asian couple in the East End of London:

*I don't know, they made more of an effort to try and make them more like a proper East End couple, whereas most Asian families actually do stick to part of their*



*identity. They didn't show that, like you know, when it was Diwali, they might have celebrated, they don't show anything like that and they don't really recognize it, which I think is quite rude, because there are quite a large number of ethnic minorities in London.*

Priya's stance draws attention to the importance she attaches to the rites, rituals and cultural practices of the Indian culture in the creation of cultural identity. She sees a need for authenticity in television representations. In keeping with other criticisms of characterizations, her emphasis is on the need for showing ethnic minorities with cultural differences alongside their British way of life; not just what makes acceptable viewing for the masses. These interviewees want characters to display a 'cultural authenticity' or a sense of belonging. As one respondent stated it is about 'keeping it real'. What most people are, therefore, in favour of is cultural pluralism within minority ethnic representations – namely, differences highlighted, but still acceptable within society. They are critical of some of the prevalent, dominant ideologies reflected by television, namely, of wanting to maintain the status quo.

Waheeda, 17, is one of the few interviewees who suggests that she watches television in a non-ethnicized way, as one might assume, many teenagers would. She describes her favourite programmes as being soaps and sitcoms, and bases much of her viewing overtly around personalities on television. She tends to analyse the programmes as a whole, and rarely refers to any ethnic minority representations. For example in *EastEnders* the characters and issues

are what interest her: *'you feel you know them and you say 'I feel sorry for them'*. She also says she watches *'because of the storylines and because I want to know what Grant is getting up to'*. One of the key reasons she mentions for enjoying **EastEnders** is because of the storylines and as she says: *'it was just something to talk about and you get to school and it is 'oh did you see Eastenders?' ... it's just something....'*. She derives her pleasure largely from discussions with her peers, which follows the watching of programmes.

Waheeda enjoys 'soap talk' which theorists such as Scannell (1989) and Gillespie (1995) have associated particularly with soap operas because of their narrative themes and open textual structure. What is suggested is that because the text does not impose a moral regime on viewers, it instead provides a resource for people to talk about in an active and creative way. Soap talk often functions as a surrogate for talk about family and personal concern, which cannot be directly voiced. It is suggested that soap opera is a resource for discussions about personal and sexual morality amongst British Asian girls and that such talk illustrates the centrality of morality and ethics for self identity and constitutes a set of tools and guide to action within social relationships (Barker, 1998). Waheeda, who mentions frequent rowing between her mother and self on matters relating to her behaviour as a young Muslim woman, possibly finds 'soap talk' provides the outlet for discussions on personal matters.

Jenny, 17, criticises the 'tokenism' of ethnic minority characters in soaps, the dotting of characters, here and there, in an effort to reflect the multicultural aspects of London, especially in the case of popular programmes like **EastEnders**:

*a programme like EastEnders, they try to make it a very multicultural programme and then they bring one black person into it or maybe two, and then say 'Oh look we are being interrelational' whatever'. Nearly all the people in EastEnders are white. They used to have an Asian family but they have gone now and I think they should use more of a mixture. I think they can't just pick one or two black people and then say they are making a multi-cultural programme.*

When talking about other representations on television, Jenny also comments on the fact that so many ethnic minorities are stereotyped:

*I mean when you see a Chinese person on television normally, they can't speak English properly, they have a strong accent and it is the same with most races and cultures. I think they are very stereotypical about how they represent people. There are different sorts of people in the world, there is not just one type, but they always seem to focus on the stereotype.*

Here Jenny dwells on the negative aspects of showing 'cultural authenticity' and differences. She feels there is a need for greater integration and more positive roles for ethnic minority characters, in roles that show the way in



which people of different races really live, and have generally assimilated into society and become 'British'. Paul, Priya, Shirley and Jasmeet also ask for more realistic portrayals, however, in a slightly different way. Their focus is on emphasizing cultural differences, including some of the stereotypes of which Jenny is critical. What she sees as outright, negative stereotyping, they sometimes see as authenticity, something to be proud of and a way of preserving 'difference' in the minds of viewers. These conflicts of opinion reflect some of the ambivalence and contradiction that exists in the viewing patterns of second and third generation young people, with some more 'situated' and others more 'situational' with their belonging. As noted earlier, closeness of family and relationships with the community, will impact on how television representations are interpreted.

## Comedy

Many comedies are mentioned in the course of the interviews but one that was particularly prominent and groundbreaking at the time was **Goodness Gracious Me**, a comedy sketch programme with an all-Asian cast, which attracted a variety of comments. Like all popular culture, comedy is seen to be a reflection of the wider social, economic and political processes within which the 'popular' provides space for what Christine Gledhill (1988) has described as, 'pleasurable negotiations', whereby consumers of texts negotiate their

meanings in order to make sense of them, within their own particular social or cultural framework. Comedy has the unique ability to be political in that it frequently transgresses boundaries – much of it owes its existence to saying the unsayable and doing the undoable of the hegemonic culture (Andrews, 1998). This particular comedy show mocks the prejudices of both white British and British Asians, subverts stereotypes and turns racism on its head in an irreverent but for the most part, inoffensive way. It has been described as representing the avant-garde of popular hybrid forms, drawing on both British and Asian culture, but emerging as something new and distinct (Gillespie, 1999). In the late 1990s, this was seen to reflect the ideals of New Labour, 'Cool Britannia' and most importantly, a new confidence amongst second and third generation Asians. It was felt to be the appropriate moment for such a programme on mainstream BBC television.

In each case, the respondents have embraced the show differently. James, for instance, finds it to mock Asian sensibilities too overtly; the way he decodes the comedy is that rather than empowering Asian viewers, it dwells on all the negative aspects of Asian culture, as assumed by the white, mainstream audiences. He does not feel the socio-political climate is ready for such a comedy. The use of Asian 'stereotypes' is something he feels Britain has barely moved away from, especially in the minds of the mass audience, and therefore, for Asians to mock themselves in such an overt way is foolhardy. This, he believes is simply recreating in the minds of audiences, that which for decades, ethnic minorities and particularly in this case Asians, have struggled

to shake off; stigma surrounding 'strange' cultural practices, customs and beliefs. James states:

*I saw one episode of it and one or two scenes I found funny, the others I thought were very stereotypical and I didn't enjoy. Because at the end of the day. I think Asians should be proud of themselves. I think they have a lot to offer to various cultures and the society.*

James' comments are tuned in with the mindset of the first generation or parent generation, in that he believes in assimilation in order to get ahead; the need 'to adapt' and be part of British society. This comedy, in many ways, draws out those differences that he would prefer to remain behind closed doors. His criticisms implicitly refer to the role of the mass media in the public sphere, in terms of the images it generates and the political shaping of people's minds via its messages. He is therefore concerned about the message being given out by this comedy show to the white indigenous population, who may have little social interaction with Asians.

Waheeda's concerns mirror those of James' around the use of stereotypes, and a realisation that people often may not be laughing 'with' us but 'at' us. When she refers to **Goodness Gracious Me** she says:

*I really liked that because it really plays with the stereotypical ideas, and I find that really funny. But I was talking to a teacher and she was like saying 'although we*



*might find it funny because we know, you know all those people who have set ideas – they might think ‘oh this is how Asian people really are’ so they may have a negative input like that’. It really made me think – ‘yes that is true’.*

The fact that the show may inadvertently be giving the Asian stereotype a wider audience causes concern for a number of the viewers. Although Waheeda enjoys the humour and cleverness of jokes, she is also concerned about the message that may be sent out to the not-so liberal sections of society, who may take the representations at face value. Again there is a clear reference to the potential the media has for shaping beliefs, values and identities.

Although entertained by the series, Jasmeet also recognises that many other Asians, particularly older ones, have reservations about the show. *‘A lot of people were insulted by that but I wasn’t really insulted, I think it was quite funny because whatever they did, whatever they portrayed was quite true’.* She is however, concerned about the lack of respect shown for the older generation and their values and beliefs. She illustrates this by narrating how an explicit sketch within the show, which was imitating a scene from the film **Ghost**, offended her father:

*my Dad was like, ‘Oh My God’ and plus it was a programme where Indians were doing this. He sort of shouted ‘turn it off’ you know, cause when he sees white people*

*doing this, it's like 'that's what they are like', you know what I mean, and he sort of like denies that Indian people are like this as well.*

From this statement there is a clear insight into where Jasmeet's views possibly emanate from - the distinction made between 'white' people and 'Indian' people is reminiscent of Jasmeet's earlier usage of binary oppositions. Here it is also evidenced as part of her father's vocabulary, which she appears to have absorbed. One of the key points to emerge from discussions on this comedy is that many of the older generation find the programme rather offensive in that it blatantly plays on stereotypes, often of older people, which they see as including themselves. The objection is largely, that for years, they have tried to move away from the very stereotypes that are now being portrayed by their own children, to a mainstream audience. They do not believe that all the audiences will understand the irony of the situations, and instead of being a leap forward, the programme could take race relations back a few years. Jasmeet highlights the expectations that the older generation have of their children's generation, the second generation – the fact that they do not expect their young people to behave in a way that is akin to the English/white young people of Britain, or become too 'Westernized'. Again, she is very open and candid about the clear distinctions she draws between white people and Asian people, and the generational differences, to which she believes I can relate.

For Shelina, this comedy show, like a number of other programmes, is offensive on the grounds of religion and morality. She states that initially she did find the show highly entertaining:

*To begin with I thought it was really funny and I made a special effort to sit and watch it. But then it got to the point where certain jokes especially when it was aimed at religion and things like that, I got a little bit, not offended, but I thought it just wasn't funny; I kind of got put off by that.*

Like Jasmeet, she mentions that the older generation, her parents included, who got fed up with the programme being 'explicit' and 'stupid'. There is a reiteration of how far the Asian audience is willing to allow 'their' culture and religious practices to be parodied, for the benefit of a largely white mainstream audience. The emphasis is on the marking of cultural and religious boundaries, beyond which one should not step.

Priya's concerns about the programme is that it has such a wide mainstream, white audience, whom she feels may not be capable of distinguishing between the reality and the parody in the comedy stereotypes:

*I don't know because, like, when I am with my friends who are Asian or Black, we all like, laugh like 'Did you see that last night?'. I think we laugh because we relate to that or like, we understand it. But I think someone was telling me that GGM had*



*actually a larger audience of white people and it gets worrying, because like, we can - I don't know if it is fair to say, that it is alright for us to laugh, but then if they started laughing at us, it is sort of like, they are 'taking the piss' out of us, you know what I mean.*

Like Waheeda, Priya openly expresses concern about 'white' people's inability to distinguish caricatures from real life Asian people. The positive/negative dichotomy within the series, which sometimes send up the Asian characters, is seen as particularly alarming. As she states 'we', including myself as the Asian researcher, and even her black friends, can laugh as 'cultural insiders' or as people who have knowledge of racism and stereotyping, but should white audiences. Priya draws distinctions between the various ethnic groupings and creates markers that identify varying levels of acceptance within her cultural domain. She has clear doubts about the messages being sent out by this comedy, which are similar to those expressed in the past about comedies like **Till Death Us Do Part** - the crucial question is, are the stereotypes understood in the spirit intended, or are they simply taken at face value?

Anil Gupta, the creator and producer of the show defends the use of stereotypes in **Goodness Gracious Me** as highly effective, in the way they are subverted and exaggerated, however, for many of the interviewees the show is seen to be balancing dangerously between anti-racist and racist imagery. The comments of the interviewees suggests that they believe the notion of

multiculturalism and intercultural communication in Britain still has some way to go, and to therefore assume that the wider audiences are sophisticated and capable of seeing the humour as intended, is largely a fallacy. Their concern is does the show really subvert constraining stereotypes or simply reinforce them? As Sreberny (2000) suggests, any works that focus on racism or xenophobia, which **Goodness Gracious Me** does in an inverted satiric way, helps define and sustain diasporic consciousness. Another possible interpretation is that some respondents feel the show has crossed-over and should really be aimed more closely at Asian audiences. They would prefer it to have a more niche audience, giving them a sense of ownership over a highly successful show, that has a number of in-jokes about 'their' culture and practices that people outside of the culture would not really understand; the emphasis being on cultural 'insiderism' or 'outsiderism'. With **EastEnders**, which is seen to be reality-based, the main criticism is the lack of authenticity and realism in the characterizations, and the need for greater cultural authenticity. In contrast, it is felt that **Goodness Gracious Me**, by virtue of being a comedy, will invite the audience to laugh at and ridicule Asian people through the use of stereotypes. In a sense, the genre creates a difference context and ambience for the characterisations – although the stereotypes are parodies, it is felt that this may be overlooked and/or misrepresented.

The show **The Real McCoy**, which was a predecessor of **Goodness Gracious Me**, was a comedy sketch show featuring largely African and African-Caribbean comedians and one or two Asian ones. The show revolved around

aspects of 'Black' culture and again played on stereotypes. In his analysis of the programme, which he calls a 'favourite', Paul asserts that black people on television need to portray good representations in the main, aimed primarily at black audiences. He particularly likes one of the comedians called **Felix Dexter**, who appeared on **The Real McCoy** because *'he still knows where he's coming from'*. On the other hand he is far more critical of **Lenny Henry**, stating: *'he's funny but as far as I am concerned he doesn't represent for a black comedian, as far as I'm concerned he represents for like the white people and then the black people'*. Felix Dexter has more credibility in his eyes, primarily because he is on a very black-oriented comedy show and shows himself as being 'situated' in black culture. Lenny Henry, on the other hand, who often appears on prime-time television, in a number of different types of programmes is seen to have 'sold out' or crossed over to the mainstream, and therefore in his eyes, lacks credibility as a black actor. He does not approve of Lenny Henry's assimilation or 'rootlessness' as he sees it. Like the critics of **Goodness Gracious Me**, Paul is more concerned with maintaining cultural possession of black characters and programmes. The 'burden of representation' still has relevance – to do otherwise is to 'sell out' or lose sight of one's point of origin or cultural roots.

Donna, like Paul enjoys **The Real McCoy**, but conversely, sees the need for more black programmes that cross over and reach mainstream audiences. As in the case of **Goodness Gracious Me**, she shows concern that too many in-jokes may not be understood or may be misinterpreted, leading to



mainstream audiences seeing the parodies as realities, for example, turning a black male character in a sketch into a representation for all similar young black men. Donna envisages the future of good programming as having a basis in crossing over; being more mainstream but in a more responsible and educational way.

*Aiming at all audiences so that everyone can actually relate to other people. If someone hasn't gone to school with a person of a different colour, sometimes they may switch on The Real McCoy and think every single black man's going to be a sweet boy, when they're not. I think sometimes comedy is good and it's funny and everything but sometimes. I think they have to relate to real life people.*

Desmonds, based in a black barbershop in Peckham, however, is one black comedy that Donna mentions enjoying because it features people of Guyanese origin, which she can relate to:

*yeah, I could relate to Desmond's cos my parents come from the same country as Desmond, so some of the jokes inside there I could understand. Yeah, Desmonds was like our family, could have a good laugh about that.*

Donna contradicts herself by initially stating that by being 'too black' programmes like The Real McCoy may alienate mainstream viewers or create stereotypes in their minds, and yet she finds great pleasure in the programme Desmond's. On the one hand, she wants to see assimilation, in terms of only

positive portrayals on programmes like **The Real McCoy**; on the other hand, she seeks to differentiate herself from the mainstream in relation to **Desmond's**. She shows a pride about being a cultural insider, who has special understanding of all the nuances of the humour, as a result of belonging to that particular cultural grouping.

Raliat's comments on **The Real McCoy** are that although it is funny – *'sometimes you felt they were going over the top, or playing it too much, y'know we are all black....*

Like Donna, Raliat is critical of **The Real McCoy**, in ways similar to those expressed by some viewers of **Goodness Gracious Me** – about the need to keep the stereotypes and parodying within bounds. There is a fear that by playing up the caricatures, they may alienate ethnic viewers and/or create a misrepresentation in the minds of less worldly, white viewers, about ethnic minorities. In some ways, they fear the specificity of collective belonging, which is shown through caricatures and particular sketches, of being essentialized into racism by viewers, incapable of distinguishing irony from reality (Brah, 1996).

These examples highlight the ways in which my interviewees are 'situational' and 'situated' in terms of their belonging, according to the context. In this case, the fact that they feel their private sphere enters the public sphere, namely, that their cultural differences are on mainstream television, makes

them fear being either misrepresented or stereotyped. What the majority seek to emphasize is the need for 'cultural authenticity', alongside Britishness, to be reflected in television representations in order to promote cultural pluralism.

### **'Multi-Ethnic Media Public Sphere'**

Using Charles Husband's notion of 'the multi-ethnic media public sphere', I have chosen to explore the expectations that my interviewees have of future television programming, in a well-established multi-ethnic society. I have, in so doing, allowed them to move from their 'reactive' stances to more 'proactive' ones. They were made to feel empowered, by providing suggestions on future representation and programming for ethnic minorities, and this allowed a further insight into their political and cultural beliefs. For example, Shelina's desire for more Islamic programming is both a reflection of her rather traditional, religious upbringing and sensitivity towards programmes that she feels misrepresent Islam. She is aware of Islamophobia in the West and feels that this would provide an ideal way to educate a mainstream population. I also got the impression that she felt this suggestion was something that she felt was expected of her as a Muslim in Britain. Paul, on the other hand, wanted to see *'more black programmes, sensible ones, know what I mean. Not them silly little ones where they got black people as second-class*



*people....'*. His emphasis is on showing black people on an equal footing with others in society; not as marginalized people. Shirley wanted to see a change in the time-schedule of black programming – *'It's just so stupid waiting up until two o'clock in the morning, just to see something that only lasts for twenty five minutes ...* Having programmes aimed at minority audiences, within prime-time, rather than pushed into the twilight hours is her main suggestion. In each case, the respondents challenge what they see as the 'politics of television' or 'race' representation on television; in other words, the lingering colonial mentality and hegemony of the dominant culture.

All the interviewees point to the lack of positive representations and realistic imagery, especially in terms of providing good role models for young people. Paul expresses admiration for black people or black characters on television, who reflect a reality and awareness of their roots and background, and do not necessarily 'crossover' to the mainstream. He mentions **Top of the Pops**, and says – *"I mean I watched it last week and I see Coolio on it, I see Puff Daddy, I see a couple of other black artists. I mean they're not sell-outs, y'know what I mean. I mean they're keeping it real.* 'Keeping it real' is one of the qualities that many of the interviewees regard as necessary for all ethnic minority actors and characters. What they want to see is an embracing of roots and ethnicity, and a promoting of their 'Otherness' with pride. What is being critiqued here is hybridity and multiculturalism, and what is being promoted is a cultural pluralism, whereby one can 'keep it real' but still live as an integrated part of Britain. A case of being 'situated' but also 'situational' in terms of belonging,

when necessary. As a viewer, Paul reveals a great deal about his identity. He has clear opinions on programmes that he watches, and why particular programmes give more pleasure than others. He negotiates on a number of different levels, which are clearly influenced by his race and ethnicity, gender, and class. For example, one of the programmes that he expresses a true dislike for is the American sitcom **Friends** which he sees as too saccharin, where *'everything's too sweet'*, admitting that he is perhaps less tolerant because all the characters were American, white and middle class. He draws a comparison between **EastEnders** and **Friends**, pointing out the realism in the former and lack in the latter: *Friends is a load of rubbish. I'd never give it the time of day. Plus it's American as well. I can relate to things that are more British or English.* Paul puts into play a number of binary oppositions to help express himself – 'English' versus 'American', 'realism' versus 'saccharin' in programming, 'middle class' versus 'working class', 'white' versus 'black'. This exemplifies the various different levels at which he negotiates his sense of belonging.

Waheeda suggests that there is a definite need for role models for young Asians; television characters in more professional roles to act as inspiration: *'they need to show them as lawyers and things like that. They don't have that with Asian people and I think they need to do more to influence more Asian young people to think, 'we can do whatever we want if we want to.* Donna similarly feels the need for *'strong black role models'* which children and young people can relate to and be inspired by – *'I want them to show different people from different levels,*

*where they've actually been brought up, how they've been brought up and different areas they live.... yeah, reality'. She goes on to say that 'in the actual media there aren't enough strong black role models that children or even someone like myself could say ' yeah, I'm going to look up to, I'm going to be like that''. Ade maintains that compared to British television series, U.S. series like **NYPD Blue** and **Homicide** provide good black role models: *what attracts me to these programmes is when I see the black guys who are so articulate.... for me that really makes me want to say, well yeah, I want to be like that, sort of thing.**

What all my interviewees want to see are positive black representations on television. They still see good portrayals as a rarity, and therefore, there is a greater pressure on those that do appear; the 'burden of representation' still remains in the minds of these second and third generation viewers.

Ling expresses concern about the lack of Oriental faces on the small screen and contrasts this with the volume of black and white faces on television:

*I always find there is always a battle between black and white, isn't there? And then, like EastEnders, there is black and white. There are so many hundreds and thousands of different types of people out there and there are loads of kinds of races, not just black and white.*

Although she comments on unfair representation, she also feels that the visibility of race seems to govern far too much in society. She particularly



mentions this in relation to television and a dearth of oriental faces on screen. She however, then goes on to state that people should not be on television simply because they are black, Asian or Oriental but because they are the best person for the job – based on merit and worthiness rather than fitting a quota.

The variety of suggestions and critiques of British terrestrial programming reflect the degree of awareness and sensitivity that these young people have towards ethnic minority representations. Although most interviewees do not favour niche or ghetto programming, they do want to see realistic portrayals of their ethnic groups on television. Surprisingly, the use of stereotypes is often welcomed in order to give a representation or categorization of their ethnic grouping – a way of differentiating themselves from other cultures; of highlighting their cultural difference. The whole notion of stereotypes carrying implicit narratives that are often negative, has to a degree, been turned into a positive thing. It is not stereotyping in the old sense, but a case of showing cultural authenticity or of ‘keeping it real’. The crux of the matter, as Dyer suggests, is who proposes the stereotype? In this case it is the ethnic minority viewers doing the proposing and they therefore feel in control.

## Summary of findings

The television consumption of these young people provides a clear illustration of the ways in which they negotiate their identities, in terms of their ethnicity, within all spheres of their life - the private/personal sphere is brought together with the public one. What is important to recognize is that however much one claims to simply watch television for entertainment in a detached fashion, interpretations are far more subjective, often governed by religion, gender, politics or race and ethnicity. They are affected by both subjectivity and social context. People consume and appropriate television in accordance with their definitions of ethnicity and awareness of cultural differences. Shelina, for example, who is from a fairly strict Muslim family background, construed many of the programmes in accordance with their portrayal of Islam, and this marker in turn determined the worthiness of the programme and her enjoyment of it. Shirley's more essentialist take on the whole notion of 'being black' caused her to constantly criticize the inability of programmes to create or show 'authentic' black characters. More specifically, Shirley wanted to be able to locate the exact cultural background of the characters, and not see a confused melange of different black cultures, represented in one person. Over-assimilation amongst Asians into the wider British society, as shown in television programmes, was something that

Jasmeet felt was unrealistic and a total misnomer. Her essentialist construction of her Indian identity, governs her criticism of Asian characters as being shown to readily assimilate into British society. It is a misrepresentation in her eyes, to show an Indian family on television as too 'Westernised' because she sees this firstly, as unrealistic, since to her knowledge, Asians in Britain are far more traditional and insular in their ways. And more importantly, this is a reflection of a multicultural Britain that pushes the need for ethnic minorities to embrace 'sameness' rather than 'difference', and does not encourage the cultural plurality and diversity, as reflected in Britain.

Those more in favour of cultural assimilation are also aware of the limitations of multicultural programming that exists on British television. Donna, who refuses to put herself into a category or call herself 'black' nonetheless shows awareness of all the existing black programmes and characters, many of which she regards as negative portrayals. Ade, who similarly, feels more 'English' than anything else, is also critical of the limited black imagery on British television. In some ways, the dearth of good black representations has made all of them more acutely critical of the few that do exist. There is still a pressure on television to not only reflect the status quo, but to lead public opinion on important issues such as 'race'.

The comedy show *Goodness Gracious Me*, to an extent, is indicative of the 'new confidence' of some second and third generation Asians, living in



London. The creators of the show, themselves second-generation Asians, have felt confident enough to parody Asian people and their customs and beliefs for a mainstream audience, in the belief that certain myths surrounding race and ethnicity have largely been quashed. Many of my respondents, in response, are proud of the fact that it has been so well received and lauded, by crossing boundaries and reaching a mainstream, largely white, audience. The fear however that still remains is that many of the in-jokes and cultural references will either by-pass many of the viewers, or in other cases, some audiences will simply miss the parodying nature of the sketches and instead interpret the characters as being representative of Asian people. What is seen to be of particular concern is that one is never sure of the extent to which the audiences are 'laughing with us or at us'. As Hall (1995) suggests black jokes about black people to black audiences, can be read very differently when broadcast to more culturally differentiated audiences. This apprehension, in part, stems largely from the reactions of the parent-generation, that find the comedy sketches too close to the knuckle, in what they choose to depict. Many feel a sense of betrayal, since these are the very portrayals that they have fought hard to eradicate. Out of respect for the older generation, many of my interviewees are critical of the comedy, and how it will ultimately be interpreted by society at large. Another approach to the comedy is one that suggests an exaggerated cultural superiority or 'strategic essentialism' (Spivak 1990) being expressed by the ethnic minority youth; a kind of binary opposition between 'themselves' versus the 'white population', who could not

possibly fully understand all the nuances and cultural beliefs and practices expressed in this Asian comedy show. Or perhaps this is an example of the 'new confidence' that would prefer niche programming, or programmes aimed exclusively at Asians, with in-jokes; a way of *'keeping it real'*.

The most significant finding to emerge from this analysis of television viewing is the desire for ethnic minorities to be accepted in mainstream programming - not as just another race-less person, but as people who embody 'difference' and 'otherness' and are still acceptable. They would like to be portrayed credibly and see some references to 'the cultural memories and attachment to places' that they as ethnic minorities hold dear (Ross 2000; Sreberny 2000). In the words of some of my interviewees, it is all about *'keeping it real'*, *'not too much crossover'* and not being *'too westernized'*. Some of the interviewees even promote the concept of the stereotype, which resists the current cultural politics of representation that increasingly questions essentialist stereotypes, whether 'negative' or 'positive'. A crucial criticism is that within the current competitive climate of television today, programme makers are simply attempting to merge Black and Asian characters into the mainstream programming to attract viewers, without any reference to their cultural differences and practices. This is seen as both patronizing and disrespectful - in a roundabout way, it is seen as another example of the 'racialized regime of representation', which concurs with argument that the liberal philosophy of multiculturalism has always focused on assimilation, rather than celebrating cultural difference.

Using forms of stereotypes within programming, as put forward by my respondents, is in order to promote cultural authenticity and reflect a diasporic reality; if this requires a throwback to 'saris, steelbands and samosas', so be it. This approach, I believe, highlights the 'new confidence' of second and third generation young people. It is seen as a means of familiarising the mass audience with 'cultural differences', in order to encourage greater understanding of the heterogeneity of ethnic minorities. Many of the criticisms of my interviewees only go to reaffirm the suggestion that the media representations can both register and contribute to the shifting political and cultural climate of 'race' and 'ethnicity' and notions of multiculturalism. The repositioning, however, seems to point in the direction of greater cultural pluralism.

In terms of my continuum, the difficulty of plotting a person as a hybrid or in favour of assimilation becomes clearly evident. As members of society we all function on different levels, and when discussing television viewing my sample reveal a diversity of opinions. The ability to negotiate their positions according to the circumstances or context has been explicitly illustrated here. The relationship between the media and ethnic minorities is typically characterized by continuity, conflict and change. It is rightly suggested that as media audiences of ethnic minority backgrounds, we are invited to construct a sense of who 'we are' in relation to who 'we are not', whether as 'us' or 'them', or 'insider or outsider...' (Cottle, 2000:2). It is all to do with 'situational belonging'.



## **Chapter Five**

# **BEING BLACK, BEING 'OTHER', BEING BRITISH**

Within this chapter the focus lies on analyzing the construction of identities in youth of ethnic minority backgrounds. The significance of ethnicity in the lives of second and third generation young people is examined in relation to a number of social variables – ranging from age, generation, gender, religion to cultural background. What makes this research more interesting is the emphasis on youth identities which conjure up images of identities in crisis, of identities that are fluid or in a constant state of flux. The histories of sub-cultures and rebellion have always been associated with youth who single-mindedly seek to assert their individuality, at this stage in their lives. Class, gender and age however, are still the factors most carefully considered in relation to youth identity, compared to 'race' and 'ethnicity', which are often marginalized, by comparison.

Where black youth have been included in such debates, they have been perceived as outside of mainstream society, defined by social exclusion and marginalization (Alexander, 2000:18). Young people of Asian descent in particular, have largely remained invisible, or have been seen as passive victims caught 'between two cultures'. In more recent years, however, firstly with youth of African and African-Caribbean backgrounds, and more recently with Asian youth, there has been a turnaround in terms of how these youth are 'positioned' and more importantly, how they 'position' themselves. There is a 'new confidence' that has arisen as a reaction to the marginalization of the Black/Asian experience in Britain, that seeks to contest this through challenging, resisting and where possible transforming the dominant regimes of representation (Hall, 1987). The second and third generation British-born youth of minority backgrounds engage with, rather than suppress their 'difference'. This research chooses to concentrate on this new generation of youth and to highlight the key factors that play a role in their identity formation, and the manner in which they contest their ethnicity and their 'Britishness,' and create a sense of belonging.

Analysis of my interviewees has shown that most of them are extremely skilled at negotiating their identities, depending on the situation that they find themselves in – exaggerating their 'difference' in some circumstances, and underplaying it in others. Placing them within a particular category is therefore often problematic. Their predisposition towards or away from cultural practices and traditions, is useful in helping to understand how they

position themselves. For instance, how religious they are, how close-knit a family they have, their friends and cultural backgrounds, fluency in a 'mother tongue', cultural practices and the youth lifestyles they follow, all act as significant indicators. Age is one aspect of identity that I have particularly concentrated on in some detail, using the youth category of 16–34 year olds, as created by marketing and media organisations, in relation to programming and social trends. This is a category, now less associated with rebellion and subcultures, and more to do with lifestyle. My reasons for using this large generational category is in order to observe any differences that exist at one end of the spectrum compared to the other, in relation to the significance of ethnicity and roots in their lives. I start with the hypothesis that often, younger people succumb to peer pressures and what is considered the trend of the moment, whereas older ones, become more forward thinking about the significance of their roots. For many journeys back to a 'homeland', 'motherland' or 'country of origin' impact on the way they see themselves and their culture.

Amongst my interviewees, there is a simultaneous co-existence of both cultural change and a point beyond which there is a resistance to that change – for many clear distinctions exist between what they regard as their true culture and the reality of what they need to do, in order to get on and achieve in British society. There is also a clear wall beyond which the stretching of hybridity would be regarded as 'selling-out' or becoming a 'coconut'.

Theorists such as Stuart Hall (1987, 1990, 1992), Paul Gilroy (1997) and Homi



Bhabha (1994) applaud the seemingly, positive aspects of cultural hybridity that are seen to arise from its transgressive power, promoting cultural mixings and crossovers, others like Pnina Werbner (1997) ponder the limits of hybridity and the ambivalence to which it gives rise. Other theorists, like Ali Nobil Ahmad (2001), Rasheed Araeen (2000) and Ashwani Sharma (1996) consider the concept of cultural hybridity as both transformative and dangerous, since it is often seen to create even stronger boundaries and essentialisms. Mike Featherstone (2002) suggests 'multiculturalism' needs to be replaced by a 'cosmopolitanism' that embraces the 'otherness' of 'others' and encourages identities that are simultaneously global and local. All these theoretical stances are considered in relation to my sample in an attempt to understand their complex constructions of identity.

Definitions of cultural identity highlight the differences between essentialist and non-essentialist views, notions of identity as fixed and trans-historical on one hand, and fluid and contingent on the other (Hall 1990). Ethnic identity has been described as 'a plastic and changing badge of membership' which arises from a number of forces such as social exclusion and stigma and a political resistance to them, distinctive cultural and religious heritages as well as new forms of culture, communal and familial loyalties and marriage practices (Modood et al. 1994:119). In this chapter, with these in mind, I shall attempt to gain an understanding of the contexts within which my interview sample negotiate their identities, and plot them on my continuum.

Overall, a number of key areas have been identified as particularly influential in affecting the identity formation of my respondents. Noteworthy factors include family, school, friends, collective belonging, visible difference, religion, and roots. I have, therefore, divided this analysis chapter into a number of relevant sub-headings, with each subject area examined in order to ascertain how significant a role they play in the interviewees' identity formations. This approach, allows me to gain a greater understanding of the ambivalence and juxtapositioning that takes place within many of the interviewees, in terms of 'situated' and 'situational' belonging. Different subject matters awaken different emotions and viewpoints, and this is what I wish to reveal. For example, the interviewees who may appear more essentialist in certain matters such as religion and family, emerge as more assimilationist, perhaps, in terms of friendships. The contradictions are the most crucial points of significance in trying to understand how identities are negotiated.

## **Roots and ethnicity**

Within this first section, I would like to draw on a couple of hypotheses surrounding the notion of roots. Spivak (1990) maintains that the search for roots is essentialist, symbolising fixity and an unwillingness to change, and nevertheless understands that some individuals may feel a need for roots;

often those individuals who feel marginalized, are in some senses empowered through the creation of counter-narratives, stemming from roots and origins elsewhere. It gives them a voice – allows the subaltern to speak. Clifford (1992) on the other hand, looks at culture less in terms of ‘roots’ but more in terms of travel and ‘routes’, promoting movement and change and a ‘cosmopolitanism’, rather than an obsession with the past and points of origin. What I seek to explore in relation to my sample is the fluidity and fixity that exists in relation to their roots, and the degrees of essentialism or cosmopolitanism that may exist in terms of their identity. Do they, as I tentatively suggest, start off in early youth more in favour of ‘routes’ but land up being more ‘rooted’ in later youth; in other words, are they more open and all embracing as youngsters but more inward-looking as they grow older? These are some of the issues that I seek to explore here, through detailed discussion of their answers, presented as direct quotes in italics, for the benefit of the readers.

Many of the interviewees make reference to their ‘roots’, when deciding how they chose to define themselves – for example, *‘I am Black because they are my roots’* or *‘My roots are.... but I am British’*. In some cases the connection is with a cultural past, and in other cases, a particular geographical place. This is often passed on through their parents, or from having close links with members of the same community. In some cases very strong notions of a ‘cultural essence’ is exhibited when discussing traditions to which they aspire, whereas others embrace a kind of juxtapositioning that encompasses degrees



of essentialism, in certain circumstances, and assimilation in others. Very few, however, totally reject their roots. By taking journeys back to the 'homeland', in their formative teenage years, several of the interviewees have a heightened awareness of their roots, and are keen to incorporate the effect of the experience into descriptions about their identities. Within this context, one could say that rather than travel enlightening and broadening their horizons, as suggested by Clifford (1992), these 'routes' could lead directly back to a closer affirmation of their 'roots' and past, creating a more 'situated' or fixed belonging.

I have chosen to examine the complexities that surround identity formation and the various influences that these young people perceive to be at the core of their identities. The notion of identity, it has been suggested, is a process of 'becoming' not simply of 'being' (Hall 1989). My question is to what extent does it change, develop or modify, and to what extent can it be considered almost a given; as something pre-ordained, innate or fixed, by these young people? How far does their perception of socialization or conditioning within the home, family or community affect their life choices and way of behaving? Do they believe that cultural identity is something that already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture?

Raliat, 26, shows strong awareness of the stereotypes that surround 'being black' and 'being Nigerian', and therefore understands the need to be able to switch codes where necessary, in relation to what is done or said, in particular

contexts; to become a 'skilled navigator' (Baumann 1996). She particularly emphasizes the need for young people to be confident about their roots and cultural background, when appropriate, and expresses a dislike for those that deny their ethnic origins. Being extremely conscious of the stereotypes surrounding her, Raliat reveals that on occasions when she is feeling uncomfortable, she chooses to highlight her 'Britishness'. She has no qualms about playing down her Nigerian roots when talking to an 'English' (white) person, but does however, find it annoying if someone hides their origins, in less hostile situations. In her words, the answers are dependent '*on who or what or why*'. This is a very clear example of 'situational belonging', dependent on how others choose to position her, and how she positions herself according to the circumstances. This sense of belonging is derived not from cultural hybridity but according to context - one moment Raliat may be 'Nigerian' and very proud of her roots, and the next she is as 'British' as the next person. In her own words, she explains:

*... I am British, if an English person asks where I am from. Rather than saying I am Nigerian, because I know they want to put you in a corner -if I am Nigerian, that means whatever bad points about Nigerians they have to say, they will actually say to me. I don't want to pigeonhole myself in any situation. If an ethnic minority person asks me where I am from, depending, again who they were, and what they want to know for, I always say I am Nigerian. I wouldn't say I was English or from North London or wherever. Cos I know I also find it annoying if you ask someone where they*

*are from, someone of colour, you can see they are black, and they tell you, I am from England or Crouch End .... you wonder. So it all depends on who, or what, or why.*

Raliat exudes a strong political awareness of what it means to be 'Black' and more particularly 'Nigerian'. This politicized approach to identity is probably, both a combination of the fact that she is a graduate of International Studies, and that socially she mainly mixes with other Nigerians and therefore, has a first-hand knowledge of some of the problems they face. Strategic use of different answers, in different contexts, is something that many of the young people are aware of, and use regularly, to explain themselves; endless re-positioning based on the contingent or context (Hall 1991).

In a number of cases, however, my interviewees tend to have a clear definition of their identities. For example, many of the young people in my sample quite vehemently refuse to call themselves 'British', or perhaps do so as an afterthought. They show a preference for belonging to a collective 'Other'. In many of their eyes, 'being British' or 'English' means having to be a true native of the land; part of the 'white' indigenous population (Parekh 2000). In part, this 'situatedness' as 'Other' could be an attempt to invert the racism by embracing 'difference'; creating a counter-narrative to deal with marginalization (Spivak 1990). On another level, it can be seen as a reflection of the time, the zeitgeist of the new millennium whereby ethnic minority young people are more committed to showing their cultural differences and



asserting themselves in terms of their different cultural backgrounds. It is seen as more acceptable to be 'different' on a cultural level.

I acknowledge that as an Asian female interviewer, I may have subconsciously encouraged and/or allowed the interviewees to talk overtly about their 'Otherness' and 'difference' with a greater confidence and candour than had I been a white female or male interviewer. Raliat's openness about switching her emphasis, depending on the situation, is vocalized quite explicitly because she does not feel, in any way, compromised by the context of the interview. Having conversed with me on previous occasions, she probably felt able to express her strategic identity positions and use of discursive competences, believing that I would be able to understand. If the interviewer had been different – white, or perhaps less receptive, may be she would have exaggerated her feelings of 'Britishness' instead.

Priya, 17, asserts that even though she has a British passport, she does not see herself as 'British' – *I don't know, maybe I associate British with being white – I feel more comfortable being classed as Indian or Asian.* Her answer corresponds closely with Parekh's (2000) findings in his report on the future of multiculturalism in Britain; the way in which 'Britishness' has always connoted 'whiteness', and therefore, implies an exclusivity, applicable only to people of the right skin colour. Priya is a confident teenager, who openly expresses opinions on most issues. Although generally, one could put her into the category of a 'hybrid cosmopolitan' embracing integration on many levels,

she reveals that she feels uncomfortable calling herself 'British' because of the racialized, cultural differences.

Jasmeet, 17, is similarly clear on how she prefers to define herself as '*Indian*', although brought up in Britain, and '*definitely not British*' because of the historical implications of the Raj and colonial imperialism. As far as she is concerned, her dislike of Britain's past, in terms of its Empire, would never allow her to call herself 'British'. On one level she may have been trying to impress me by saying what she feels I wanted to hear, particularly with my being older than her, and Asian. On another level, however, it would appear that she simply wants to feel part of a culture that she respects; by embracing her parents' culture and beliefs, she derives a deeper sense of belonging. In some senses, it is a commemoration of the past, based in history that does not allow the interviewee to forget. She expresses anger for the past behaviour of the British as colonialists: '*I know what Britain did to certain countries especially India. I hate that kind of stuff. I'm really angry about that*'. This hostility, in part, may have been heightened by a recent visit to India, and in particular, by visiting some of the major historical sites, which evoke memories of oppression and colonialism. This politics-driven approach to her identity choices, rooted in the history of British imperialism, may also be one of her strategies for dealing with racism in Britain; a way of allowing the subaltern to speak, as suggested by Spivak (1990).

Throughout the interview Jasmeet emphasizes the binary oppositions – ‘them’ versus ‘us’ and the ‘West’ versus the ‘East’, and suggests that she does not favour crossover or integration into British culture as such, since in some way this is seen as a betrayal of her roots and culture and allegiance to a ‘homeland’. This can, in part, be explained by her having been brought up in Southall, amongst the Asian community, with all of her close friends being of Asian backgrounds. She seems to justify this by saying: *‘so like with them I have an identity, a sort of culture with them as well. So we’re sort of like not too Westernized, we sort of respect the ideas of our families and of our parents’*. For this interviewee, collective belonging is of far more importance than her individual identity. She fits the description of the imaginations of the deterritorialized people as being marked correspondingly by ‘absentee patriotism and long distance nationalism’ (Pieterse 1995). She has an idealized notion of what it means to be an Indian, and embraces the traditions as far as possible. She wishes to portray herself as a ‘rooted’ native. During the interview, she felt so at ease that on occasions, she changed from English to Punjabi words, assuming that I would understand her.

Raj, 32, calls himself ‘Indian’ even though born in England, because he feels *‘more Indian than anything else’ - I suppose when I was growing up I was never really accepted as an Englishman. So, really I am accepted as an Indian and that is it really – so I am Indian.*



He sees his identity based around the fact that he is 'Indian' and is ethnicized by the majority culture on the basis of this. He also maintains that his Asian values keep him close to his culture: *'Asians have more of a culture and more family values than the Western European'*. In a sense, Raj is far more embracing of his culture, in part, due to feeling rejected by the indigenous population. By embracing this 'Otherness', he is able to explain his place in British society and to create a 'narrative of location' for himself. The emphasis on his roots and ethnicity could be seen as a response to this feeling of rejection. A trip to India is initially described as a 'culture shock', but also a total eye-opening experience. Raj, who is the oldest interviewee in the sample, has worked in a variety of jobs – as estate agent and within the Asian media. This, I feel, also affects how he situates himself. He is very close to his parents and still lives at home with them, and in some respects has absorbed their values and belief systems. He mentions how his job in Asian television was a positive move since he met many more young Asians, which pleased his parents: *'Basically my parents said "whatever you do enjoy yourself, but don't take the wrong path" – that was my parent's upbringing. And I think since I started working for TV Asia they saw I was getting a bit more "culturised"; I think at one stage they were a bit worried that I was getting a bit too "Westernised"'*. Raj's sense of belonging is largely derived from his parent's beliefs and values. Like Jasmeet, Raj treated me as someone who could relate to what he was saying, evidenced by him occasionally putting on an Indian accent to imitate his parents, something he would not have done in another interview scenario.

Shirley, 17, describes her first trip back to the 'homeland' as life changing, in that she says it made her '*grow up*' and realise where she was from, and what her roots mean to her. Her ultimate 'route' to her 'roots' would be to go back to Ghana to die: '*Fair enough I live in Britain but it is not my country; I don't want to die in England, I want to die in Ghana*'. This rather dramatic statement carries with it a highly romanticised belief in a true 'homeland', the 'myth of origin' and the finality of return through death. The locating of her belonging, quite clearly in another geographical space, is quite intriguing in someone so young. The militancy of the statement, I feel, has to have been formulated as a result of her close relationship with her parents, who both maintain close links with their culture and community, through their respective jobs. Her father is an interpreter for the Ghanaian language and her mother works in a black hair salon. As a result she may have regular contact with the Ghanaian community, particularly the older generation, who have influenced her way of thinking – creating nostalgia for the 'motherland' and a strong desire to be rooted. Through this embracing of a homeland, Shirley promotes the belief in a cultural essence and fixity of roots derived from external, collective beliefs.

Raliat, 26, and James, 29, two of the older interviewees, are both graduates, in full-time employment, and exhibit a sophistication on how they locate themselves as minorities in Britain. They have both lived in their native 'homelands' and therefore seem to handle questions surrounding their identity, with a greater confidence and assuredness than many of the others. Both James and Raliat talk openly about the competences that they utilize in

their day-to-day interactions, something that presumably they would not reveal to an interviewer who was part of the dominant culture.

Raliat has a clear sense of her ethnic identity because she states she '*knows who she is*', and does not feel a need to constantly assert her cultural differences like some of her 'Nigerian friends' in Britain, who have never been back to Nigeria. She is capable of sliding in and out of roles, depending on the context, without feeling as if she is being 'untrue' to herself. James, similarly, has spent time with his grandparents in Sri Lanka and claims to have a deeper knowledge of his culture, as a result. He, therefore, feels when in Britain, he is able to pick and choose bits of the culture he likes, without losing sight of his own true culture. He constantly mentions the '*need to adapt to the system*', namely, to the British way of life, and is critical of fellow Asians who do not:

*I've always gone back to Sri Lanka, which is where I am originally from, but at the same time, because I've lived in London, now, for twenty years, I've adapted to the culture, picked a lot of things for my own benefit...so I think I am Asian, but at the same time I've adapted to the system.*

James expresses guilt about having a foot in each camp; of being 'cosmopolitan' in some senses. Like Raliat, he simply selects aspects of cultures that he likes and uses them to his advantage. In other words, he is 'situational' about his belonging – *This may be very selfish but I pick and choose,*



*you know there are certain things about the Asian culture that I don't like, but I do like other things, so I rather pick and choose you know...*

What can be concluded is that the identities of these two interviewees consist of both cosmopolitan and diasporic experiences, which has led to the celebration of plurality (Gillespie, 1995). These two second-generation young people exemplify my notion of 'situational' belonging, by seemingly being able to move with ease in and out of roles, depending on the contexts. In part, they are able to do this with greater ease than others because of the confidence they attach to being 'situated' in terms of their roots and ethnicity, by spending more time than their peers in their country of origin.

### **Visible difference: 'race' versus 'ethnicity'**

When discussing identity within this section, the emphasis is primarily focusing on the construction of identities based around our dissimilarity or 'difference' – rather than considering the 'commonality' with other people. The focus is on what differentiates here. The whole idea of 'self' being learnt as a response to others and their perceptions of us – the notion of 'the looking glass self' (Cooley 1922). In the case of my respondents, the differences they highlight are often based around common-sense physical and 'visible' characteristics namely 'skin colour' or 'ethnic differences', based on how

society defines them. There is still evidence to suggest that the colour of one's skin or clear distinguishing characteristics play a key role in how second and third generation youth of ethnic minority backgrounds define themselves. This is as a direct result of how they are 'racialized' or 'ethnicized' by others through the existence of racist ideologies, and in turn become 'racialized' in our their outlooks.

Asked to describe themselves in terms of their identity, most of my British-born interviewees refer to their 'difference' and 'Otherness' as key determinants of their identity, rather than simply referring to their 'Britishness'. They are uneasy about calling themselves 'British'. As stated above, in many cases, it is largely based on how they believe society perceives them. With others, however, there appears to be a genuine, closer identification with their parents' country of origin; 'a homeland' that they too would like to embrace as their own, in order to achieve a clear sense of belonging. This is further heightened by visits back to the 'homeland', which often prove to be significant moments, in terms of how they define themselves. Many of the Asians in the sample either refer to themselves as 'Indian', 'Asian' or 'Pakistani', with 'British' often simply being a reference to their nationality and the fact they have British passports. In the case of African and African-Caribbeans, although often keen to embrace the 'British' aspect of their identity, they highlight their perceived visible difference or 'racialization', as the aspect that requires them to say they are 'Black' first and foremost, and then 'British' or 'English'. Their physical differences including

colour of skin, which over time has come to be politicized under the banner of 'Black', is what primarily determines their description of self.

The most notable difference that emerges between these two rather homogenous racial groupings that I use, is that in the case of the Asian segment of the sample, most interviewees highlight their differences based on 'cultural' rather than 'visible' differences, whereas amongst the African and African-Caribbeans, the emphasis is largely on their visible, physical differences. These are some of the differences, as traditionally highlighted by anthropologists such as Sue Benson (1996). The point that needs to be made here once again, is how these young people appear to 'position' themselves, is a direct result of how they see themselves 'positioned' by society at large, or even within their own communities. Any references to 'skin' and visible distinctions that I make are direct references to what my respondents have said.

Gabrielle, 17, chooses to say that she is 'Indian' because that is how she looks, and how she feels people expect her to answer, however, when possible she likes to specify the exact part of India that she is from, namely Goa:



*I would classify myself as 'Indian' like, you know, when I've filled out my application form and things. Then I tell them it's Goa in India, because if I say Asian then I am sort of generalizing. I could be saying like 'I could be Chinese...y'know all those countries in Asia. So I would say Indian to be specific.*

More than anything, Gabrielle is aware of her differences as being largely based around the visible, in this case, skin colour and ethnic difference. She displays a rather self-conscious disposition and worries about what others think of her, revealing that when she was younger, she was very embarrassed about being 'Asian' and wanted to be 'white' or 'black' because she felt it was more acceptable. In terms of her identity, she now always say that she is 'Indian' and more specifically 'Goan', because she feels if she says she is 'British' she is more likely to be questioned. To her mind, being British, means being white, and therefore, how she looks must determine her identity; she is governed by how others see her. Almost as an afterthought, she ends the discussion by adding that she is now proud of her origin. I felt that Gabrielle's final statement was something that she had said specifically for my benefit – she still shows unease about being 'Asian' and 'other' in Britain.

Ling, 17, is another interviewee who suggests that she is forced to accept that her looks set her apart and signify 'otherness', but she is very keen to emphasize that she is as 'British' or 'English' as the next person. She is critical of her family and friends for staying too segregated, and sees this cultural conservatism or maintaining of close cultural links as somehow restrictive

and close-minded (Brah, 1996). She blames her 'racialization' by the dominant society on the lack of integration of her ethnic peers and community. By way of contrast, she displays open-mindedness and a desire to embrace cultural assimilation, of crossing borders and cultures. I felt Ling exhibited a naivety on matters relating to her identity, seeming convinced that if she embraced her ethnicity beyond the obvious, phenotypical differences, she would be lessening her status in society. Ling chooses to distance herself as far away from her roots as possible. In many senses, her behaviour encompasses a kind of youthful rebellion against conformity within the family. She does not want to be like her parents or other Vietnamese – *I am as much as you say English, British whatever, but you just look at me and say 'No you are not'. I am 100% blood Vietnamese, but in the sense that I was born here, in Coventry, no one would suspect that I am Vietnamese.*

This statement encapsulates a number of subtexts and struggles within Ling regarding her identity. In the first place, she sees herself as 'English' or 'British' but realizes that according to wider society she will always be seen as 'different'. She then acknowledges being Vietnamese – '*100% blood Vietnamese*' which exudes essentialism, especially through the use of 'blood' in the description. She then contradicts herself by suggesting that if she is not seen, no-one would suspect her as being any different from the 'norm', in this case 'white'. Through the use of the word 'suspect', she implies an almost negative or harmful element that she associates with the look; if only she did not 'look' Vietnamese, people would be able to acknowledge her as being 'English' or

'British'. She later reiterates this problem with visible differences with regard to her entry examinations for Oxford or Cambridge, claiming that there is a possibility that she could be accepted merely to make up statistics for people of her ethnic grouping which she finds totally unacceptable. Her argument is that '*you should be good enough, irrespective of colour*' and believes that if the entrance interviews were done from behind a screen, white people would be a minority at both the institutions. Although keen to downplay her visible difference, Ling shows strong awareness of some of the political and social implications governing identity, often reduced to 'race' and 'ethnicity' as a result of the colonial regimes of power, that have infiltrated into modern, cosmopolitan worlds as well (Brah 1996:3). As far as 'race' goes, she, therefore, understands it as being immutable, but her 'ethnicity' is seen as something open to individual negotiation (Alexander, 1996). At this stage in her life she largely chooses to reject it, and prefers to fit in with the indigenous, white population. Her focus is firmly on being assimilated.

As stated earlier, many of the interviewees of African and African-Caribbean backgrounds, mention their 'blackness' as the primary determinant of their identity: as Shirley, 17, states '*black, that's what you see*', and Paul, 23, describes himself as '*Black British*' and explains, that like other black people, he is aware of his 'race' as a key determining factor in his identity - what people first 'see' is a young black man. Ade, 19, similarly chooses to call himself *Black English*.

In all these cases 'being black' is something that they all choose to acknowledge, since they are aware that this is what others often focus on; it is



how they are perceived, and in many cases, situated by others, in society.

They are therefore, both racialized by others, and by themselves. 'Race' is seen to shape the production of their ethnic identities with the 'visible' difference remaining more obvious than the ethnic ones; in a sense, 'race' is their ethnic cue. They acknowledge that their visible differences have differentiated them into a social collectivity, namely being 'black'.

Only one of the African-Caribbean interviewees, Donna, chooses to overlook her 'blackness' when describing herself, stating that *it doesn't need to be said, there's no need to go to that level*. For her it is so obvious that she feels there is no need to reiterate it, and she wants to emphasise the fact that she feels as 'British' as the next person and would prefer not to draw attention to her difference. Maybe, as a result of my having spoken to her several times before, as my sister's friend, she felt able to express her annoyance at always being judged by her colour, rather than the ethnic or cultural context. Her response very much ties in with the notion that 'race' is usually applied to African and African-Caribbeans, as 'ethnicity' is applied to Asians (Benson, 1996). She seeks to defy the concept and processes of racialization; she does not want to be defined as 'Other' or to be pigeonholed into any particular social grouping. She seeks to create her own narrative of self, and to control her own identity.

'Race' is seen to make sense of the African and African-Caribbean experience because of the significance of skin colour; a biologically-derived idea (Hall

2000). Waters (1990) suggests that whites or 'white ethnics' have a lot more choice in their creation of identity, whereas for members of racial minorities, by virtue of their 'race', they are denied choice and hence creativity in the construction of their black identity. Regardless of how much they may choose not to identify themselves in 'racial' or 'ethnic' terms, they are only able to reflect and recreate the dominant ascriptions of what 'blackness' is (1990:157). This desire to move outside of the box or label that one is put in or attached to, is reflected in some of the answers. There is a defiance not to acknowledge the differences, but instead to celebrate similarities. The reality however, remains that 'race', racial divisions, racial hierarchies and discourses govern day to day life and affect ethnic minorities' ways of seeing themselves, through the eyes of others. Evidenced here is the continuing significance of 'skin colour' in constructions of identity – of how one can be 'situated' by others in terms of belonging. As suggested by Miles (1986), these young people have experience of racialization – of being defined as 'other' somatically, by the signification of largely human biological characteristics. I feel, however, that I need to acknowledge that some of these responses incorporating discussions of racialization, may have been over-emphasized by the interviewees, in response to my questions which may have, at times, appeared to be focusing specifically on 'race' and 'ethnicity' in identity.

## Collective Belonging

Whereas in the previous section the focus has been on aspects of identity that differentiate, here I would like to examine the sense of belonging derived from having a commonality with others, with an emphasis on the symbolic dimension that helps identify a group allegiance, for example, clothes, religion and cultural practices, and often helps mark and maintain cultural identities. In other words, cultural identities that reflect historical experiences and shared cultural codes, which create one people, with stable, unchanging continuous frames of reference (Hall 1989). The shared meaning systems are mentioned by my respondents, in terms of the ways in which 'their' cultures distinguish them from other groupings in society. Many make use of the binary oppositions of 'them' and 'us' to draw distinctions and create a sense of unity or belonging.

The desire to belong to a larger group or collective, in order to acquire a greater sense of belonging, is expressed by a number of the interviewees. Rather than saying that they have roots from a particular country of origin, some choose to put themselves under the more widely accepted, homogeneous, umbrella groupings of 'Black' or 'Asian' social and political constructs. James mentions his collective belonging to the group 'Asian'. He



feels, perhaps, that to say he is specifically Sri Lankan/Sinhalese, would section him in to too small or invisible a category, with less recognition or status. Or perhaps as Brah (1996) suggests, he sees it as being too specific and feels this may be interpreted as being too nationalistic or patriotic. I feel that in part he wanted me, as a fellow Asian, to regard him as culturally similar, and therefore as possessing similar values and beliefs. Being an 'Asian' in Britain puts one within an umbrella category of people from the Indian subcontinent, within a diaspora of peoples, just as being 'Black' does not specify one's exact origin, but suggests a homogeneity. Although he acknowledges more specific 'roots' in Sri Lanka, his beliefs are not steeped in the past and in myths of origin, but he instead promotes diasporic 'routes' to his identity. James espouses the virtues of cultural hybridity – 'continuity' and 'change' (Anwar 1998), 'becoming' and not simply 'being' (Hall 1987):

*Maybe it's hypocritical but I do think that keeping one's identity is important, but at the same time, we are in an alien nation and I think one has to adapt. I think that a lot of the problems, the Asian communities have, is because they alienate themselves, they distance themselves. And I think, if there was that openness, that flexibility, people might understand more.*

Within this statement, James reiterates the binary oppositions of 'them' and 'us' through the usage of terms like 'alien nation' and the need to 'adapt' but simultaneously suggests the need to focus on hybrid, cosmopolitan experiences as much as on rooted, native ones – moving the concept of culture

from the idea of specific 'roots' towards 'routes' (Clifford, 1992). This motif of travel from a place of origin to a different, almost alien society is one he constantly mentions, and feels he has adapted to over the years. In his mind the need for flexibility is necessary in order to deal with contingency and conflict, particularly relating to racism in Britain. His behaviour, in other words, is 'situational' – he can be essentialist in one instance, but all-embracing in another. He sees this as the only way to survive as an ethnic minority in Britain - through adaptability. He is an ethnic entrepreneur, who has the ability to make the most of his cultural differences and similarities, according to the context.

On the whole, collective identities are seen as more united and strong entities; providing a kind of 'strategic essentialism' that can empower (Spivak 1990). Priya takes a similar, more global approach to identity, realising she could easily be classified as both, 'Asian Indian' or 'African Asian' because although her parents came from Kenya, her grandparents originate from India, and she therefore, has close links with both countries. Throughout the interview, Priya displays openness towards different cultures and therefore on one level, is happy to be part of a global village. She does not, however, wish to be called 'British', since it does not provide a sense of security and belonging, which she derives from being 'Asian' in Britain. Conversely, Ling stresses the need to be individual as opposed to part of an ethnic collective. She sees this as a way of highlighting herself as being different from her ethnic grouping and

peers. She is critical of her family and friends for staying too isolated, as she sees it:

*Like a lot of my Vietnamese friends hang around with Vietnamese people and I don't pick my friends like that 'cos you know that there are certain areas where they all hang out. They are all Oriental but that's not how I pick my friends, you know. I couldn't stand living that kind of life 'cos a lot of them are just sad things anyway.*

Like Donna, she sees collective belonging as synonymous with the 'racialization' of her identity. It is far more important to be part of the majority culture. In some ways, it appears that her rejection of her ethnicity and cultural links is more a rebellion, than a desire to be a hybrid cosmopolitan. She would ideally prefer total assimilation, however, she is far too aware of her differences for this to be possible.

As stated in the last section, for many of the African-Caribbean interviewees the term 'black' carries significance on a number of levels: in all cases, it first and foremost refers to the visible difference, followed by the socio-political construction of 'blackness' and all its implications. 'Black', largely relates to 'race', which is a political and social construct; an organizing discursive category, around which has been constructed a system of socio-economic power, exploitation and exclusion, namely racism (Hall 2000). However, on a political level, it has also empowered young people of African and Caribbean



backgrounds, as being part of a powerful collectivity, who can unite against racism and prejudice.

Paul manifests political awareness of his roots and the diaspora, first in Africa, then St Lucia, but in terms of where he lives, he is 'British'. He, in fact, emphasizes the fact that more than anything he is a 'Londoner', and illustrates how things have changed over the years for young Black Londoners:

*I mean a couple of years ago, a lot of black people in my generation would like move, more towards the Jamaican way of doing things; like dress like Jamaicans, act like Jamaicans and even talk like Jamaicans. But last couple of years, a lot of black people realized that it's not Jamaica we're from, we're from London, know what I mean. Even nowadays, black guys are even talking with a little cockney slang. Whether people like it or not that's got to be acceptable, because that's London- London's where we at and that's where we're from, that's where we're born. So can't be going around acting like you're from the States, or like you're from Jamaica, when you're born over here and this is where you're being brought up.....*

Paul acknowledges the way in which young black people have needed to belong or feel part of some kind of collective, and have, therefore, behaved in certain ways, in the past. He suggests a kind of 'arrival' in terms of now knowing how to 'position' one's self – and that is not necessarily simply via the 'route' of a diaspora. Although the global black diaspora holds

importance, he acknowledges that the local culture that one is surrounded by, is more one's own culture, than anything else. Paul exudes a militancy and willingness to fight for his birthright, to be a Londoner, stating: *'whether people like it or not its got to be acceptable'*. The fluidity and dynamism of Black British youth identity is illustrated here, and the way in which it is always in a process of 'becoming' as well as 'being' (Hall, 1992). I suggest that 'becoming' can be likened to the 'situational' in my thesis, signifying movement and change, and 'being' having a correspondance with 'situatedness' or fixity. What is relevant and important now, as Paul demonstrates, is the embracing of one's London connections as opposed to diasporic or American ones. It is now acceptable to be Black and British, a Black Londoner. Here one can see 'the end of the notion of the essential black subject', whereby there are no longer easy definitions of how to define the identities of young black people; the emphasis lies with the heterogeneity of black identity.

There are occasions, however, when Paul stresses his belief in notions of cultural essence, of 'being black' – things that are automatically considered 'black' in his eyes or 'cool' because they form part of what he considers to be a black vernacular culture. Here, he talks about music and how 'black music' is becoming more mainstream:

*I mean even McDonalds – there's a McDonald's ad with a reggae jingle, know what I mean? They're just trying to catch on to street and they're a bit late because really they're out of date now, but there you go.*

*He goes on to say: when it comes to music that's black anyway, know what I mean. I don't think they really got that much option than to use black music because as far as I'm concerned music is a black thing.*

Although Paul represents a newer, more confident 'black' identity, he still exhibits an awareness of the concept of 'blackness' within discourses of racialization and racism and acknowledges 'race' as a visible difference. The 'Black Britishness' he refers to here, however, signifies 'coolness' and being street-wise or savvy. This is what he is talking about when he says: *'they're just trying to catch on to street'*. In relation to popular music, he accuses the mainstream culture of muscling in on the urban black music scene; of using 'street' music in a mainstream advert. He shows pride in this aspect of 'blackness' – that gives him street credibility. The dominant regimes of representation that he knows exist, must be challenged. In his mind 'Blackness' and 'Britishness' are sometimes mutually exclusive categories, and on other occasions they overlap. This is reflected in terms of his being both Cockney and Black/South London and of the black diaspora. Although he describes a more hybrid identity for himself, Paul still has a strong leaning towards what he considers to be 'black' and feels part of a wider black collective. The way he 'positions' himself is again very much dependent on



the situation he finds himself in. In London, in the late 1990s, edging towards a new millenium, he feels this is totally possible and acceptable. He can be 'Black', 'British' or a 'Londoner', or all three depending on the context and circumstances. Throughout this discussion of identity, Paul exudes a confidence – he is clearly enamoured by the subject and shows awareness of all the structural constraints that govern his positionings, but states, that ultimately he is in control.

Ade, 19, interestingly, describes himself as '*Black English*'. I say interestingly, because very few of the interviewees refer to themselves as 'English' - 'British' is far more acceptable. This is because 'British' is seen to be more inclusive, whereas 'English' generally implies 'whiteness' and an exclusiveness, in most of their minds. Based on his racial background, Ade sees himself as 'Black' but regards himself as 'English', since he feels alienated from his Nigerian roots. He describes a trip to Nigeria, a few years earlier, when he was made to feel totally out of place and 'different'. As a result, he locates himself in England, the place he was born and lives, and sees himself as 'English', based perhaps, more on location and less on the implicit connotations of what it means to be 'English' (Parekh, 2000). His experiences in the so-called 'homeland', where he was made to feel like an outsider, like someone who did not belong, has resulted in his wanting to be accepted as 'English' in order to achieve a sense of belonging. Another explanation for Ade's desire to be seen as 'English' is that he comes across as quite ambitious, in terms of his career. Perhaps by promoting his 'Englishness' rather than his being Nigerian

or Black, he feels he will stand a better chance of being accepted as a future lawyer; he will acquire greater 'cultural capital'. Ade seeks to destroy the notion of an 'essential black subject' – striving to assert his individuality and create his own self-narrative, without any reference to external constraints from family and communities, unlike most of the Asian interviewees. Both, Paul and Ade exhibit a good deal of confidence compared to some of the female interviewees. In part, my being a female interviewer, and their use of bravado in order to impress may have influenced this.

Donna, 26, is another black interviewee, who openly seems to contest her ethnicity and blackness, throughout the interview. In terms of her identity, Donna begins by emphasizing her individuality, and not being part of a collective. She describes herself as '*an individual, open to ideas, not prejudiced against a particular person, because of their race, or their sexuality*'. She attributes this to having attended a school that was predominantly white, with only a handful of ethnic minority peers. She reveals however, that at some point in her teenage years, she felt the need to be part of an ethnic collective or grouping, of having a need to 'belong'. She states:

*I found myself at 16 when I left school, making the decision; there are not many black people here, let me leave and go where there are black people and Asian people, that I can actually relate to and talk to because I don't want people thinking 'oh she's a black girl and she thinks she's white'.*

Firstly, one can see how aware Donna really is, about being black and her need to belong, and not be a pariah within her ethnic group. By saying: *'I don't want people thinking she's a black girl and she thinks she's white'*, she shows awareness of the essentialist notions surrounding what it means to be 'white' or 'black'. Donna is conscious of the maintenance of difference between groups, through the symbolic construction of boundaries (Barth 1969) and absolutist notions of black culture (Back 1996:153). When discussing her identity, on four separate occasions, Donna refers to herself as being a very 'open person'. Perhaps, by reiterating this, she is attempting to distance herself from the prejudices and hostility that may be projected towards white and other communities, from within the black community. The insult of 'coconut' aimed at black people, seen to have co-opted white norms, by disapproving black peers, implies an essential character of 'blackness', or a kind of ethnic absolutism, that separates cultural and racial absolutes from the historical circumstances that give them meaning (Gilroy, 1987:43-71). This is something that Donna understands, and to an extent wishes to be part of, but also wants to assert her own standpoint, when necessary. On one level, she feels the need to situate herself, however, more generally, she is far more situational and open.



Within this section, the notion of 'collective belonging' versus individuality has been examined. There is clear evidence of 'structure' working with 'agency' – since many discussions refer to the importance of friends, family and community in the respondents' lives and their need to be part of a collective. In most cases, the emphasis is on being part of their collective ethnic grouping, which is seen to provide a sense of security and cultural belonging. In some cases, however, being 'British' or 'English' is seen as strategically more empowering than being part of a minority culture in Britain.

## Religion

Religion, like gender, is one aspect of identity in particular that tends to influence one's subjectivity and identity. It has been acknowledged as a source of guidance in the identities of young people, particularly by the older, parent-generation, who in many cases ensures that their offspring attend religious classes in order to maintain religious awareness. This is most evident amongst the female Muslim members of my sample, but also with some of the others. As with ethnicity, religion is often manipulated and invested with a wide variety of meanings, by the young people. Although some discrepancies may exist between the actual requirements of Islam and what is practiced, my

respondents see Islam as a way of guiding their behaviour and value systems; whereas ethnicity may become permeable, religion and its boundaries are regarded as more fixed and unchanging, and therefore provide a greater sense of security and belonging (Jacobson 1998).

Shelina, a Pakistani Muslim, highlights religion as '*very important*' to her lifestyle and outlook, affecting her attitude and belief systems – towards men, style of dress, and the way in which she conducts herself. When younger, she was made to attend Arabic classes and the mosque, along with her siblings, which she disliked immensely. As she has got older, however, she claims to be more accepting of her religion and its principles. From the interview, what one gleans however, is that Shelina has little choice and is constrained by parental and community obligations and expectations. Respect for her family and its reputation, requires her to embrace her religion as an integral part of her cultural upbringing. On a number of occasions she confides that she has lapsed on some levels – in terms of meeting and going out with boys, the way in which she dresses when her father is not around, and her true views on love and marriage. These occasions are expressed as both exciting, as well as moments of extreme disobedience, which she feels able to share with me, as a fellow Asian, who she assumes must have some awareness of restrictive, parental controls.

Shelina does however, tend to refer to Islam in discussions about various aspects of identity; in some ways it is all pervasive. What particularly annoys

her is the degree of Islamophobia in British society, which she partly blames on the narrow-mindedness of the Pakistani community and its interpretation of the Koran: *'Like Pakistanis....they are very narrow-minded as Pakistanis, not as Muslims, but they come across saying 'my religion says it is wrong' but it isn't their 'religion' that says that, it is their 'culture - and a lot of people think Oh God, Muslims are really strict'*. A clear distinction is drawn between the Pakistani culture and Islam as a religion; she criticizes the former and embraces the latter.

Years of being socialized as a Muslim in Britain has provided Shelina with a strategic way of dealing with racism and prejudice; Islam provides a sense of belonging, and a means of dealing with the ambiguities and dilemmas of her circumstances (Jacobson, 1998). Her social identity derives from knowledge of her membership of this religious group, together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership (Tajfel, 1978).

Waheeda, on the other hand, who is also a Muslim, openly declares that following her religion is a chore, something she has to do, rather than wants to do. Talking about the role of Islam in her life, she says: *It decides what you eat, how you dress, what you do. Like in the back of your mind you are always getting counselled for something*. One of the ways in which it particularly seems to affect her, is the manner in which it governs her teenage lifestyle. Like Shelina, Waheeda draws particular attention to clothes and the manner in which one is expected to dress, as a young Muslim woman. Her comments



correspond with research that has found that young Muslim women are well aware of the role of dress as an over-determined marker of identity. Dress is often used as a signifier for essentialized and oppositional identities in dominant paradigms that explains the lives of young South Asian Muslim women through a binary opposition between 'traditional' and 'Western', which is often straightforwardly read from appearances (Dwyer, 1997, 1999). In some cases, in order to define their own identities, the codes associated with different styles of dress are subverted or redefined, but the process of negotiation is always complex, since individuals are positioned within a variety of discourses, which produce a constellation of different meanings around dress. On the one hand they seek to challenge the 'traditional'/'Western' dichotomy, which structures dominant representations, and at the same time they also negotiate the expectations of local Asian community, which places a high premium on female sexual purity and morality (Dwyer, 1997:55). Both Waheeda and Shelina demonstrate an acute awareness, that as young Muslim women, they are not allowed to dress in certain ways and are expected to observe a certain standard of modesty. This is described as stifling their ability to express themselves through fashion and clothes. Shelina mentions occasions when she sneaks out of the house in clothes that her 'father' would not approve of her wearing; however, her mother does not mind. This highlights the gendered aspects of the religion, governing in particular the behaviour of female Muslims in the household.

Like Shelina, Waheeda describes being made to attend a special school for Arabic and Bengali till she joined secondary school, after which she made a decision to stop attending. Waheeda's younger sisters, who now have the same lessons seem to enjoy them, which quite clearly baffles Waheeda: *My little sisters both enjoy it which I find really weird because I hated going and would try to get out of it.* Waheeda constantly asserts her individuality and the ways in which she differs from her sisters and parents, in relation to Islam – emphasizing her open-mindedness in terms of religion, marriage and relationships. She does not want to be associated with the accepted notions of Islam as extremist and insular. In order to emphasize this openness, she mentions how she would consider marrying outside of her religion and ethnicity, if the occasion arose. This discomfiture about being Muslim drives her to express a greater sense of individuality and lack of collective belonging than may really be the case.

As a youngster, Raliat spent some years in Egypt, learning Arabic and the Koran. She is a Muslim but maintains that certain aspects of the religion do not fit her lifestyle in Britain and therefore does not adhere to them, in the strictest sense. She confirms however, that when in Nigeria she would try and follow all the practices more rigidly:

*You have to pray five times a day - the covering of hair I don't do, but if in Nigeria I would do, so it would really depend where you are. I know that my sisters, who are all in Nigeria, practice the religion and they all cover their hair and they all cover their*

*bodies. For me, it is not in tune with the life that I live in England, I feel a sense of freedom and I don't want to.....*

As with other young people of second and third generations, Raliat selects aspects of her culture and religion that suit her lifestyle in Britain and rejects aspects deemed too traditional or out of date. Although a Muslim, she is much more 'situational' than other interviewees, about how she observes the religious practices, depending very much on the situation and environment within which she finds herself. Marriage, however, is one area where she admits to being a little more traditional, and states she would never marry a non-Muslim.

James, a recent convert, explains being drawn to Islam by the apparent holding power of the religion, particularly on families that he knows; this uniting power of the religion impressed him enough to make him convert. He is however, not a practicing Muslim, and appears to have converted to impress a Muslim girlfriend of the time. He is largely Muslim in name only, and it has little bearing on his social, cultural or religious practices: *'I am Islamic, I am a Muslim, but I am non-practising'*. His mother by contrast is a devout Roman Catholic. James' whimsical approach to this conversion is again in keeping with his open-mindedness and cosmopolitanism.

Jasmeet, who is a Sikh, takes her religion quite seriously, perhaps in part because her father is President of a Gurdwara (a Sikh temple) in Southall.



When discussing her Sikhism, she concedes that her present religious devotion may stem from a recent trip to India, during which she had been rather enlightened:

*Going there and learning about my history, and like, especially about things like the Muslim massacre and the Mughal emperors, you get to know more about your cultural heritage, and you think, oh my gosh, these people were sacrificed just for us to believe in the religion, just to respect it. So I have been respecting it a bit more.*

By overtly stressing the ethnic and religious divisions between Muslims and Sikhs, she articulates a belief-system that is very much steeped in the historical past. Before launching into a criticism of Muslims, she did feel the need to ask my religious background and felt more assured when I revealed I was not Muslim. Her ardent religious conviction appears to be a self-conscious desire to highlight her commitment to her religious background. She does, however, end the conversation on a rather contradictory note by stating that both her sisters and herself are *'balanced'* in terms of religion:

*'Um.. we don't sort of rebel against it, or anything like that. We are like, with it, but we are not too into it, we are not too devoted to it. 'Cos like, you can't be too religious, you know what I mean, not in this society, no way, you can't... it's true.'* There is a clear move from being *'situated'* in a religious past to being *'situational'*, in accordance with the British youth lifestyle. This statement is out of character with the rest of her opinions on various subjects, and in some ways I feel she

was trying to appear more open-minded, after her earlier condemnation of Muslims.

Raj, a practising Hindu, associates his religious interest with his parents, who are devout Hindus and regular temple worshippers. He describes visiting the temple every Saturday and sometimes even on Sunday in the past, however, not so over the last few years: *'I went through a phase when I thought religion was very, very important. I think I just went through a bad patch and I reverted to religion and it helped me a great deal. I still do a little prayer before I go to work every morning'*. As someone who is very close to his family and parents, Raj's attendance at the temple seems more of a duty than something he would regularly choose to do.

Gabrielle, a Catholic, uses her religion as a link with her deceased parents and her cultural roots that lie in Goa. Since her parents died, she has been going to Church more often:

*I still think He (God) did it for a reason or something like that. I still have that in me, that's why I go to Church more, because I know that my Mum and Dad would like me to go to Church. They wouldn't want me to give up on God and things like that...*

Religion, in the case of some of the interviewees, as suggested by Jacobson, provides a clear sense of belonging, in terms of being part of a collective belief system. Many of them have been influenced by the position of religion within

their immediate families; in some cases it reinforces distinctive ethnic identities and provides clear guidelines on day-to-day behaviour. For the older generation religion is seen as a way of laying down codes of behaviour. In the case of Islam in particular, distinctions are made between the ethnic and religious identities, with the latter often seen as more important, for example, 'Muslim' first and foremost and then 'Bangladeshi', 'Pakistani' or 'Indian'. What is most interesting however, is the way in which religion features differently amongst the different groups in the sample. For the Muslims, it is considered a life-governing principle; for the Hindus and Sikhs it plays a role in their ethnic backgrounds, relating particularly to rituals and rites of passage such as births, marriages, and deaths. For the Christians in the sample, it may feature in the context of marriage but is considerably less significant to their ethnic identities.

## Gender

Gender, along with race and ethnicity, needs to be acknowledged as one of the key factors governing identity. It cannot be viewed in isolation since it is not simply based on how individuals see themselves, but how society and cultures position them. There are therefore many different forms of masculinity and femininity that need to be considered within contemporary



gender relations. As with debates around race, gender has less to do with biological determinism and more to do with social constructions of gender, derived from social and cultural processes. Femininity and masculinity vary dramatically across cultures so even within a single society, different social and cultural contexts linked to race, ethnicity, age, class and sexual orientation can alter gender differences. It is clear from women's narratives that they are 'situated' differently and differentially across a variety of discourses, with some posing a challenge to patriarchal notions, and others reiterating patriarchal values (Brah 1996). Both conscious and unconscious processes shape gender-identities however, it must be remembered that gender is not primarily the property of individuals but rather of societies; of social institutions and of cultures.

These cultural expectations surrounding individuals, particularly the female Asian respondents in the sample, are often openly acknowledged, whereas the male interviewees rarely refer to their status as men, and in some ways simply assume their roles as the natural course of events, thus continuing the patriarchal regime/discourses that already exist in society. Many of the gendered positions need to be teased out of the conversations on identity, relationships and television. My main focus on gender is at key moments when the young people's responses suggest 'gendered situated-ness' or 'gendered belonging'.

In some cases, explicit references to gender and especially to womanhood are clear attempts to defy being pigeonholed on the basis of another attribute, for example, by one's race and/or ethnicity. Donna refers to herself as being a *'positive 90s woman'*. In part, this emphasis is highlighted when she talks about some of her leisure practices; reading self-development books for women which she feels help boost her confidence and make her feel more positive about herself. Oprah Winfrey is also mentioned as her favourite personality on television, whom she admires for her candour and ability to show sensitivity to the audience on her show. For Donna, the emphasis is on being situated as a strong woman, rather than simply 'being black'. This way, she can collectively belong to a group, but not one that she sees as being as highly politicized or ostracized by the indigenous white population, by virtue of being 'black'. This approach allows her the ability to select aspects of various cultures that she may wish to embrace as a woman, which could possibly include being 'black' or 'African-Caribbean'. It is clearly about situating her belonging, in accordance with the circumstances.

Raliat also prefers to base her identity around being a career woman, living in Britain; to highlight 'gendered' belonging rather than 'ethnic'. Asked if her gender takes precedence over other factors, such as ethnicity and religion, she states:

*I don't want anyone to confront me for my religion or my colour, or whatever, I just want them to look at me. First of all I am a woman, so talk to me as a woman, or refer*

*to me as a human being, not even as a woman. I don't want anyone to talk down to me as a woman or whatever. Just think of me as a human being like yourself and treat me as you would any other human being.*

Here Raliat expresses the desire to be the 'same' and not 'other' or different at any level. Like Donna, being a woman with a career, makes her part of a more acceptable collective, one that women of all backgrounds can belong to, irrespective of colour, caste or creed. She now belongs to a group within which she does not feel is as ostracized (being Black) or demonized (being Muslim). It also allows her homogeneity along with heterogeneity – being a woman, along with being 'Black' and 'Muslim'. As she states, there are occasions when she would prefer to be seen as a female, or even a human being, without being confronted with all the misconceptions and stereotypes surrounding 'Blackness' and 'Islam'.

As a woman and a practising Muslim, Shelina accepts that Islam governs her behaviour. She is however, openly critical of people who misinterpret the Koran, stating its true message is that although the roles of men and women are different, they should be regarded as equal:

*I have to say it pisses me off really because we are portrayed as a religion which says women can't do this that and the other, and we have to cover up and are not allowed out, and it is not like that at all, because the truth is that our religion is very caring. It*



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*teaches love, it teaches romance, giving, and things like that... it is a very loving religion.*

Talking to an Asian woman interviewer, Shelina feels able to express clear resentment for the misrepresentation of the status of women in Islam. By defending Islam, she wants to make clear that her religion as such, does not hold her back in terms of life opportunities. She blames this on the Pakistani community, particularly the male community, rather than her religion - seeing the former as being narrow-minded and backward in its beliefs, especially in their desire to maintain the subservient role of women. In terms of her family and home life, Shelina describes spending a great deal of time, at home with her mother. She mentions listening to the Asian music radio station, **Sunrise Radio** together, when cooking in the kitchen, and sitting together in her mother's bedroom when watching television. This is partly because the male members of the household are often out, or want to watch something else, or simply because the women often feel more relaxed watching television on their own, especially if there is something remotely risqué on the screen:

*'I could watch things like that with my Mum, and we will have a laugh and joke about it. But if my Dad and brothers are there... like last night we were all sitting together and something was on, Ally McBeal I think, something came on and it was a bit rude, and me and my Mum can laugh together, but not in front of my brothers and Dad, purely because we feel embarrassed.'*

Here Shelina, highlights the distinctive and traditional masculine and feminine roles that exist in her home, stemming from her Pakistani cultural background. In the case of Shelina, even though a career woman, she has little choice when at home, but to accept the gender differences. These culminate in gendered roles and leisure practices that largely involve her mother, sister and female friends. It is considered a duty to preserve the family's good name and respect by behaving in an appropriate way, in order to avoid bringing shame on the family. Her reference to the equality of sexes, as preached in the Koran, is used as a way of justifying her role as a Muslim woman. It makes her gendered status seem more acceptable and less oppressive.

One of the male interviewees, Paul, alongside his race and ethnicity, often alludes to his masculinity, and the role it plays in his life as a young black man in London. This is reiterated throughout the interview. One of the clearest examples, mentioned earlier in the television discussions, pertains to the roles of black male characters in soaps – Alan is seen as a shameful representation of young Black men in London – a 'pushover'. According to Paul there are certain characteristics and expectations that go with that role –

passivity is not one of them. These origins of 'black macho', it is suggested, are to be found in the search for 'manliness' as defined by the dominant white society. It constitutes 'a facade of power', which is concerned with the negotiation of personal control through interaction (Wallace 1990:199). Other suggestions include that black masculinity is best understood as an articulated response to structural inequality, enacting and subverting the dominant definitions of power and control – a base for interaction and negotiation with the wider society, which is internally neither homogeneous nor unified. These tensions are seen to question the bounds of social constructions concerning 'race' and 'masculinity' and are seen to underline the fluidity of black male identity (Alexander 1996:137-8). What also needs to be acknowledged here, however, is that many of the African-Caribbean female respondents also found Alan a poor representation, feeling he was not tough or man enough, thereby suggesting they too have gendered notions and expectations of how black men should behave.

As the oldest son in the family who takes care of his parents, Raj exhibits some of the traditional male Asian attitudes that help maintain the patriarchal regime within Asian families. When discussing marriage, he admits to having old-fashioned notions that see the man as the breadwinner and the woman putting her family before her career, and describes the kind of wife that would be acceptable to him. James, the other Asian male in the sample, by expressing a preference for an Asian wife perhaps, similarly believes that the



cultural, gendered roles of an Asian woman are far preferable to those of any other.

A pertinent point relating to gender and the interviewees, I feel, would be the fact that as a female interviewer, of an ethnic minority background, many of the sample, particularly the young women, would not have felt the need to explicitly discuss gender. In many cases, gender implications are simply taken as understood. For example, many of the female respondents, particularly Asian, when discussing relationships and marriage, talk about respecting their parents' wishes and not wanting to give them cause for embarrassment. None of the respondents explicitly talk about their role as women and the notion of 'izzat' or respect, but it is continuously implied. They all, by virtue of their socialization and cultural upbringing have roles and obligations to fulfil and expectations to live up to, and I am seen as already privy to this, as a result of my ethnic background.

## **Friends/peers**

Friendship is one particular area that is clearly indicative of the levels of assimilation and integration that take place amongst ethnic minority groups. In the case of my sample, of second and third generation young people, friendship and socialising patterns indicate the level of permeability of ethnic

boundaries. A number of the younger people in the sample are simultaneously critical of their peer groups, especially those of the same ethnic minority background, who they feel act in too essentialist a manner, and yet, a number of them suggest that only their own ethnic peers can totally relate to them on the same level. Although people never explicitly suggest that this is a deliberate move, their friendships are consciously framed around shared experiences, activities and localities; a feeling of being at ease and a greater depth of understanding, having been through similar experiences (Modood et al 1994).

When talking about her Asian friends, Priya suggests an almost love-hate relationship whereby she is very critical of their lack of integration and narrow-mindedness but yet most at ease with them:

*I've got loads of white friends, loads of black friends, Chinese, whatever, but I don't know, there's something that just always makes you...I mean, I know some of them from like when I was much younger as well. But apart from that, you sort of, they introduce you to each other.*

Priya does however, seek to emphasise the fact that she is different from a lot of her Asian peers and far more open-minded, which she attributes to growing up in mixed, largely white neighbourhoods, and within a 'less traditional family setting', as she describes it. Both her primary school and

first secondary school were predominantly white, whereas her other secondary school, based in Hounslow, was largely Asian. She states:

*I sort of found myself, like, looking at people from more of a white perspective, because like, some things, like people from Southall, their mentality towards things is a lot different to mine.*

She highlights this by being particularly critical of young Asian men and their attitudes to gay people:

*I find that, like, a lot of, particularly Asian boys, like, the way they treat, like, act towards a homosexual person. They'll go like, 'Oh dirty' but I think that is probably because in Asia the family unit is strong and traditional and like homosexuality isn't allowed. But things like that, I find myself drawn back. Maybe because my family is a lot different to a lot of other peoples.*

Priya strives to be the 'cosmopolitan', able to relate to her own as well as the larger population; in some senses, she exudes a degree of superiority over her Asian peers, who she feels lead a sheltered and insular lifestyle, largely within their own ethnic grouping. On the other hand, she openly admits that her best friends can only be Asian since there is a mutual understanding and cultural bond, that arises from their shared cultural experiences.

Like Priya, Ling, is extremely critical of her Vietnamese friends, who she regards as narrow-minded for mainly mixing amongst their own ethnic



grouping; for being too 'situated' in their belonging. Unlike Priya, however, she does not suggest having a close bond with them and in many ways wants to distance herself from them as much as possible. Both these interviewees, Priya and Ling, are in their teens, at the younger end of the age spectrum, and clearly want to assert their individuality and prove themselves as being able to integrate with a variety of people, not just their own ethnic groups. Priya however, is more 'situational' whereas Ling simply wants to assimilate and detach herself from her ethnic background.

When discussing his friendships, Ade quite astutely draws on factors that govern his relationships and the cultural mixes of his friendships. Like Priya, he emphasizes his ability to switch between groups of people with ease. He is conscious of the different pleasures he derives from various groups of friends:

*The reason it is a mix is because I do different things. For example, I used to play basketball so I've met some of my friends from there, and then because I study politics and English Literature, some of my friends come from college. For reasons I don't know – sociologists would know – but the ones that studied politics with me tend to be white but the ones I've played basketball with are black.*

Here he draws attention to the widely acknowledged stereotypes of black men as sports-oriented and white males by contrast, being more academic. When asked if he behaves differently when with white or black friends, he states:

*I can't remember, it was just...especially around the Stephen Lawrence thing and I remember watching it with a black friend, and a lot of things we could relate to, or whatever, when we discussed it. However, when I say makes a difference, the only reason it makes a difference is in the sort of issues we talk about...what we talk about is dependent on what group is together.*

Although, throughout the interview, Ade has sought to impress me with his openness, Englishness and to an extent, racelessness, here there is clear evidence that empathy and a sense of belonging, possibly based on cultural similarity and ethnicity, does exist between him and his ethnic peers.

Like Ade, Paul also draws clear distinctions between his black and white friends: *I'm more happier with my black friends cos they're the people I move with from day to day, but I've got white friends and associates that I move with, and I'll see them now and again.* Paul is also situational with his friendships but shows himself as being more at ease with his own ethnic peers.

Raliat, describes her youth as a time of upheaval and uses particular circumstances to distinguish herself from her other Nigerian friends in Britain. Resulting from her parents' separation, she spent some years of her childhood in Egypt learning Arabic, Islam and the Koran, followed by a number of years at boarding school in England. At the age of fifteen, she returned to Nigeria for four years to complete her schooling. All these events

are seen as important aspects of her identity formation that differentiate her from her other Nigerian friends.

*After going back to Nigeria, as a teenager, I learned far more about my culture than ever if I had stayed here..... I have friends I went to school with, who were also Nigerian, at the same time as I was schooling here, who carried on and stayed at boarding school. And their lifestyle, they are completely different people – y’know, even how they view themselves. They try being more Nigerian, I feel than I would be because I know who I am. They are not quite sure. If they had gone back to Nigeria they would know what it is all about, and they wouldn’t have to assert their culture so much, trying to make out like they are more than they actually are.*

Raliat is critical of the cultural essentialism and romanticized version of Nigeria that her friends embrace, as a result of not having lived or experienced real Nigerian life, first hand. By contrast, Raliat sees herself as more well-versed in both British and Nigerian culture, and therefore able to negotiate between the two cultures with ease. She has no need or desire to emphasize one over the other. Although, many of her friends are Nigerian, Raliat sometimes feels at odds with their insularity and their sense of belonging being so clearly ‘situated’ elsewhere.

Like Raliat, James emphasizes his cosmopolitanism when talking about his selection of friends, who come from a variety of backgrounds: *I wouldn’t say that my friends were of one particular class or one particular background. They are*



*quite varied.... The influences haven't come from just one source, it's been varied, and I think that is largely because I've had the opportunity to be in two countries, which I feel is very cosmopolitan, you know.*

Raj mentions how until his mid-twenties, he had no real Asian friends.

Working in the Asian media however, which was based in Southall, he started mixing with a number of young Asians, which particularly, pleased his parents:

*And I think since I started working for TVAsia, they saw I was getting a bit more 'culturalised', I think at one stage they were a bit worried I was getting a bit too Westernised, y'know.*

Within his explanation, Raj incorporates the ways in which family and one's ethnic background can affect one's choice of friends. Being a Muslim woman, Shelina is quite restricted in her friendships and describes most of her friends as either the children of family friends or else people well known to her parents. Donna also refers to having to consciously befriend people from ethnic minority backgrounds, in order to be able to fit within her own black community. She expresses her fear of being deemed a 'coconut' or some-one outside of her culture. In these few cases, what is quite pertinent is the fact that friendships often, are formulated a result of outside pressures; not simply one's own choice but what one feels obliged to do, in order to belong or fit into a cultural or ethnic grouping.

Most interviewees have a cross-section of friends but suggest a special closeness to people of their own ethnic backgrounds as a result of mutual understanding and experiences. What is clearly evident is that ethnic boundaries are manifest in socializing patterns, and often a certain social distance is maintained between themselves and their non-ethnic peers. Therefore, although many youth are critical of the lack of assimilation of their peers into mainstream society, they simultaneously express a special bond with those friends of the same ethnic group.

## **Family, Relationships and Marriage**

Marriage and relationships, more than any other social dimension, reflect the ways in which ethnic boundaries are drawn or maintained, highlighting the level of assimilation or essentialist thinking that one wishes to engage with or embrace. It is maintained that ethnic boundaries may be constructed and maintained around a range of signifiers, articulating in varying combinations under specific situations (Barth 1969). Ethnicity is the process by which one group constructs its distinctiveness from others. In many cases, the subject of relationships and the future, namely, marriage and having families, transforms the interviewees into more conservative individuals. For several, it becomes the symbolic point at which culture and traditions need to be passed

on in order to keep the next generation in touch with their true cultural heritage. More than half of the sample, mention the importance of their parents and their attitudes and expectations surrounding their future choice of partners and marriage. As a mark of respect for their parents and their culture, this becomes a crucial dimension of the way they choose prospective partners. And therefore marriage, especially in the case of the Asian members of the sample, is often not just a matter of individual choice but a more collective decision.

When considering marriage, James says: *'ideally I'd like to marry an Asian girl, so that when I have children, because I'd love to have children, they will sort of really know their identity'*. Here he promotes a belief in an essence of Asian identity.

Although he claims that he could possibly marry outside of his culture, his preference is to keep the culture pure and intact. This attitude, in some ways is quite surprising since James, throughout the interview, promotes belief in assimilation and the need to be cosmopolitan. Here his attitude however, reflects that of the first generation/parent generation, who have tried to adapt on most levels, but in matters of love and marriage, have largely stuck to their own, in order to maintain a cultural continuity and a connection with the 'homeland'.

Raliat, is quite vehement about marrying a Muslim: *'Like I could not marry a Christian person or some-one who wasn't a Muslim, so that for me is important enough to make my religion important'*. She does however, go on to reveal that



her long-term boyfriend who is Nigerian is not a Muslim, but states she will only marry him if he converts to Islam. When pushed about whether the relationship will end if he does not convert, she becomes less sure of her long-term intentions:

*I don't know whether I would end it, well that is where I think you change as you get older, things become more or less important to you. If I was still living in Nigeria I would never have imagined that I would ever meet somebody who was from a different tribe, never mind a different religion.*

She realises that maintaining religious boundaries are perhaps more difficult outside of one's country of religion, and yet again she suggests contingency plans; implying a strategy for situating herself and finding a way of belonging. Cultural intermixing or the mixing of cultures and ethnicities, however, is something of which Raliat is far less tolerant, stating that this will always lead to conflict and problems:

*That is why mixed marriages don't always work because there is always the problem, the conflict of culture, no matter how open we are, I know if I married a white man my children would somehow be in a dilemma...society doesn't accept you as white so you are always black, whereas with black people you are always accepted as black but still when they are talking about the white people, you know that some part of you is white. So how do you divide yourself?*

Raliat promotes a romanticized notion of ethnic purity and the strong necessity to preserve one's culture; suggesting that the mixing of two cultures would mean having to compromise every step of the way. In this instance, on matters of cultural continuity, she exhibits belief in an essential culture and an anti-assimilationist perspective.

For Shelina, the whole matter of marriage, depends on her family and their approval in whom she chooses to marry:

*I think my parents would like me to get married quite soon, because in my culture that is the way it is – if the girl follows her education, and she's working now, the next thing for her to do is to get married, and I can accept that. But at the moment I haven't found anyone, and my parents haven't found anyone we like, so it is not happening.*

The use of 'we' in this context is very significant in that she accepts the cultural and traditional role that many Asian parents play in finding a suitable boy for their daughters to marry. However, she is aware that unlike in the past, she does have a say in who she marries. Shelina is quite accepting of this process and does not express any resentment about the arrangement. As an example of her ability to make personal choices, however, she candidly chooses to reveal a short relationship that she had with a young man of African-Caribbean origin, but says that she knew from the start that it could never be serious. She could never have taken him home since her parents

would have been outraged, and would possibly have disowned her. This revelation in some senses to me, a virtual stranger, is an assertion of her free spiritedness and sense of individuality. Paramount, however, is her respect for her parents and their good name: *'I think because my dad is very recognised in our community, amongst our people - if I were to do something like that, it would bring shame on the family'*. The notion of respect or 'izzat' that Asian parents often expect of their children, particularly daughters, governs her behaviour. Above all, her family is the most important thing in her life and ultimately, she is not willing to risk hurting them. Her decisions about marriage are both gendered and 'situated' around her being a young Muslim woman with duties to fulfil, in terms of her family.

Raj also expresses traditional Asian values about family, marriage and the role of his wife, although he likes to describe himself as being fairly 'Westernized'. The importance of his family and the fact that they are a close-knit unit is reflected in the way he appears to have simply absorbed and reproduced the values of his parents:

*To me my family is very, very important. I have grown up with a very close family and I still have my values. I am an only son but I still support my family – my parents don't work. Okay, I wasn't the ideal Asian son to raise, I did have my bad points and I guess I was pretty wild, but I never did anything untoward that would upset my parents.*



He also mentions that he would not marry a girl from India unless she could fit into his lifestyle: *'yes, I mean someone who is a little bit westernized but has Asian culture and values'*. He emphasizes his conservatism and beliefs in certain values:

*'I guess I am, in a way a bit old fashioned, in a sense that the man is the breadwinner and should support the family. So if I married a girl I wouldn't expect her to put her career first, you know, ahead of the family'.*

Although he claims to not disapprove of inter-racial marriages, he casts doubt on their lasting ability: *I don't mind, but the ratio of interracial marriages working is very, very limited. I mean I have cousins who married English people and I think only one has survived.*

Jasmeet's approach to her culture and identity, like that of Raj, clearly revolves around her community and close-knit family and community, whom she describes as living in a fairly 'traditional' Indian way, through the embracing of the religion, languages, rituals and traditions. Recent visits to India have further heightened her awareness of her roots and the pride she feels for her 'culture'. Although her parents are quite easy-going, Jasmeet believes that they would definitely prefer her to marry someone within her own culture:

*they wouldn't like say 'oh no that's it, I'm gonna kill him, they would be like 'no'. My Mum says to me 'Look it's better off if you get married to some-one within your culture, I don't care if he is Hindu or Sikh, but she said to me 'don't marry a Muslim'. Like she said it not in a bad way, like I hate them, I'm racist, but like it will cause a lot of conflict.*

Jasmeet mentions that she too would prefer to situate herself within the culture:

*Cos, like I am not racist or anything, I'm just saying it will cause a lot of differences especially when it comes to children. I want my children to follow my religion cause I think y'know, obviously, when you have got your own religion, it's like 'my children are going to follow this' and they're gonna know the history - and like my husband, if he is a white guy, he would be like 'no hold up, y'know Christianity is the best for them'. So it would cause that kind of conflict.*

She mentions that one of her older sisters' is dating a Hindu and her parents accept that, but her other sister is dating 'a black guy' and she says: 'like my parents are a bit like 'he's black, y'know, come on'. She goes on to say that even though her sister has been with the guy for over three years, she too is trying to dissuade her: 'I am trying to say to her, 'look, please for Mum and Dad's sake, please y'know'. Like, even for her own culture thing, for her, I don't want her to break away from that'. For Jasmeet, the continuation of religious traditions and various other cultural practices are of great importance and therefore she

greatly disapproves of the whole idea of marrying outside of it. The cultural essentialism that governs most aspects of her identity, becomes even more prominent here.

Shelina, Raj and Jasmeet are all members of close-knit families who, as a result, have quite close connections with the homeland, religion and other traditional values. They have a clear sense of 'belonging' and are quite confident, particularly talking to me, as a fellow Asian, about their views on marriage and relationships, and their desire to maintain cultural continuity. Although in some senses, they have moved away from arranged marriages in its original form, they still find it necessary to have the approval of their parents and families. They are more traditional and 'situated' in their belonging than some of the other interviewees, on the matter of marriage.

In keeping with other areas of discussion, Priya presents a persona that believes largely in integration and being part of the British culture. She expresses an aversion to arranged marriages, stating that her parents are fully aware of her attitude to the whole issue. However, when asked about their reactions to her possibly marrying a person of a different culture or ethnic background, she is more reflective on the whole matter of family and their opinions and approval:

*My Mum said she definitely wouldn't mind, but she also said that deep down she might feel a little hurt, but maybe she knows the problems that go with it. One of my*



*uncles is married to a white lady and my cousin is half-caste and sometimes she goes through phases when she doesn't know, like sometimes she'll sort of, be in denial about being Asian, or about being white.*

Priya, like Shelina and Jasmeet, is averse to doing anything that may upset her parents or give them a bad name in the community. Like the other Asian female interviewees, respect for her parents and the notion of 'izzat' has a strong hold over her behaviour. The expectations of the older generation, is one that they all try to adhere to, especially on matters of marriage. As Priya says:

*It is not so much my immediate family, but more like the family friends and the old aunties that you know, look down...and then I don't want my parents to get a bad name for like "Oh look, they've just let their daughter run wild".*

Throughout the interview, Priya advocates both cultural integration and preservation of one's own culture, but suggests that there must be a maintenance of ethnic boundaries:

*I think it's nice to learn about different cultures, like you know at the Carnival, you learn about the Caribbean, Jamaican cultures and things like that. I think it's quite important that cultures integrate, but at the same time, I think it's nice that they stick together because if everyone just mish-mashed together for the rest of time, everything would get a bit lost.*

Here under the broad brush of individualism is a more complex set of attitudes constrained by the knowledge of parental wishes and authority, and a commitment to one's religion, and /or ethnic identity (Modood et al. 1994). Priya's sense of belonging veers between being 'situated' or fixed in a specific culture in some circumstances, and being 'situational' in other contexts. Being 'situated' and therefore more essentialist in one's approach tends to arise when parents, particularly of the first generation, are involved. The importance of roots and one's ethnic origins come to the fore.

Ling, as mentioned earlier, is one of the respondents, very keen to assert that she is different from her family and its traditional ways, and her Vietnamese peers. She shows an awareness of the existence of a tight-knit Vietnamese community, confirming that all her parents' friends are Vietnamese, and that many of her Vietnamese peers only hang around with other Vietnamese. Personally, however, she claims that she would never go out with, let alone marry, a Vietnamese guy because of their traditional ways:

*I just don't like them because a lot of them are very traditional. I think guys are taking the tradition more than girls are; for some reason. I don't know, I see the male figure as very dominant in Vietnamese society.*

Ling consequently has a white boyfriend, even though she is aware of her parents' attitude to this – her father has met him but does not know that he is her boyfriend, whereas her mother does. Her choice of boyfriend, in many

ways, appears to be a way of asserting her individuality and breaking free of the cultural boundaries and constraints that her parents wish to keep in place. It is possibly an act of teenage rebellion and yet she states she would never tell her father because:

*Number one, it's because he's not Vietnamese, and like he doesn't think I'm old enough. And number two, my Dad is never satisfied with anyone. Like my sister, brought home a Chinese boyfriend and he's like, the truth is we are Chinese descendants, but that is still not good enough.*

She says that her mother likes her boyfriend but *'at the end of the day if I was to say I want to marry him she probably wouldn't like it'*. Although Ling sees her parents as traditional and therefore in some respects problematic, she understands that they have had a completely different upbringing, and therefore tries to respect their different approach to life. She does admit there was a time when she resented it:

*I used to, but I understand a bit more because that is the way they were brought up, isn't it. It will be a lot harder for them to change from one extreme to the other. Asian people like are so different, the different traditions etc.*

When talking about her parents, Waheeda draws attention to the differences that exist between her mother and father, in terms of their attitudes to culture and traditions – her father who was schooled in Britain is more liberal,



whereas her mother who came to Britain from Bangladesh, only after her marriage is described as far more narrow-minded. She describes a friction between her mother and herself, in terms of culture and traditions. Waheeda attributes this to her being a product of her upbringing in Britain, with her culture being a mix of the East and the West. As a result, she states that her mother finds her quite strong-willed, opinionated and rebellious:

*But my Mum says that I wouldn't think like that if I wasn't living here. It is like I have strong opinions about arranged marriages and things like that, and my Mum she has never worked or anything, and I say 'why don't you, I mean you came here and had the opportunity' and she says 'because you have been brought up in a different way than I have'.*

Waheeda claims that her parents would not be too shocked if she chose to have a relationship with someone outside of their religion or ethnic background, whereas they would not expect it of her sister, who embraces the culture: *'I think they expect a different race or different from Bengali for me than my older sister because they know that I am a very strong, opinionated daughter whereas my sister is like my Mum and Dad y'know'*. Throughout the interview, Waheeda attempts to promote her liberal, non-traditional, non-Muslim approach to life. She does not want to be pigeonholed, in any way, by her background or religion. I got the impression that she felt the need to impress her individuality and independence on me. By contrast, however, when asked her

views on inter-racial marriage, she puts forward more narrow, essentialist opinions:

*It is not like I am racist or anything but I do think marriage is a hard thing to do, and if you mix race, it does become harder. It is like saying I am going to marry a white person, it is like they have a whole different way they have been brought up than I have, and say like an Asian person they would understand, while a white person they might understand, but I don't think they will fully understand why. I think it causes problems, but I am not against it or anything'.*

By supporting the notion that interracial marriage is conflictual and problematic, Waheeda, rather unwittingly, places herself in a similar category to her parents, of whom she is extremely critical. She situates her belonging within the dimension of an Asian culture, with certain defined characteristics or traits.

When discussing marriage, Shirley contradicts all that she previously professed to believe in; from embracing a highly essentialist approach to her roots and identity and 'homeland', to being far more in favour of integration when it comes to mixed relationships and marriage. Although she feels her parents would probably prefer her to marry a Ghanaian, she knows that if she is happy, they would not really mind:

*Both my brothers go out with white girls so I don't know. No I don't think they'd mind. I am pleased because our blood is well mixed as well, because my Grandma she was half-caste, she was mixed race. She was half-Scottish, so Mum and Dad don't really mind because we are already mixed.*

Shirley contradicts her own earlier statements about the importance of roots and a 'motherland', and the fact that she just lives in England but does not belong. Here she refers to 'mixed-blood' as something that she finds totally acceptable and not in the least bit problematic. This juxtaposition of essentialism with assimilation is a reflection of the many positionings that youth of the diaspora make in relation to their cultural identities. In her ideal situation, Shirley suggests that she would like to keeping everything pure Ghanaian, but the reality of everyday life is that her family, namely, her brothers, are in relationships outside of their culture, which she needs to accept, and therefore, is far more situational.

Sarah shows a more traditional approach to the institution of marriage and the whole notion of uniting families and the inevitability of children. She knows that it would bother her mother if she married outside of her ethnic background. Her comments on mixed relationships are that they are fine, so long as the respective families get along: *'I think it is fine if the families can get along. It will have a big effect on the child and stuff'*. As a practising Roman Catholic, who has lived in Africa for some years, Sarah exhibits conservatism around the institution of marriage and what it signifies. She is less concerned



with individual people and more focused on how well families collectively relate to one another. For Sarah the families need to be able to get along with one another; marriage is more than simply a relationship between two people.

Gabrielle on the other hand, is very much in favour of mixed relationships:

*I think that is fine. Because, like race shouldn't matter. I know it is quite a problem in some cases, and I know like my culture, my aunties and everything, they are strongly against African people or whatever and I don't agree with them. They just like stereotype and generalize, sort of thing. Once my sister was going out with a black boy and they didn't like it but obviously they can't say 'don't go out with him' but I could tell like. At the end of the day, I feel because we are brought up here, you just have to mix races.*

Having been brought up by a variety of foster parents of different races and ethnicities, Gabrielle is far more open about mixed relationships and interracial marriage. She believes that as a result of living in London, one must be able to integrate and assimilate on all levels.

With marriage, the whole notion of ethnic boundaries comes to the fore. The role of the family, particularly that of the first-generation parents, play a major role in the decisions made by most of my interviewees. Many of them try and assert an open-mindedness about their future relationships but ultimately state that they would never want to hurt their parents. Although in

principle many respondents favour mixed marriages, it is maintained that marrying outside of their ethnic group will possibly mar the continuation of traditions and cultural practices and lead to a dilution of the culture of origin or roots. A lack of understanding between a couple on the grounds of ethnicity and religion is also cited as grounds for concern. The views that are voiced on matters of marriage in many ways simply reiterate the thoughts of the parent generation. I had assumed that individualism might prevail on matters of marriage but in fact this is one of the least contested issues, since initial individualism always seems to give way to the wishes of the parents. At this point however, I would like to reflect on the size and composition of the sample, which does have a high proportion of young 'A' level Asian and African-Caribbean female respondents. The fact that they still live at home and in communities that construct particular gendered roles for them, often plays heavily on their attitudes at present. It is possible that the attitudes may alter once they go to university, start working or leave the family nest, and mix with a wider variety of people.

## Summary of findings

This study into the identities of second and third generation London youth has proven both challenging and intriguing. My research which began by focusing on individual constructions of self, has revealed that majority of my interviewees are aware of restrictions that affect them as agents of self. By virtue of being of an ethnic minority grouping, they are subject to a number of factors that govern their sense of belonging; of the interrelationship between subjectivity and collective belonging. The fluidity associated with hybrid identities differs in these youth, in that any hybridity that does exist is more unconscious and unintentional. I maintain that the notion of cultural hybridity which promulgates fluidity of identities, contingency and movement, transgressing national, ethnic boundaries and allowing individuals to speak from two places at once without inhabiting either, is less applicable to my interviewee sample. What my respondents appear to have developed instead is the ability to work situations to their own benefits; to be



skilled negotiators, namely, in one situation they may appear more 'British' than anything else, and in others they embrace their roots and tradition. Their positioning is therefore always 'situational' but in some areas of their lives it can become 'situated'. They therefore move between essentialism, integration and assimilation. Being 'situated' is more akin to being essentialist or fixed in beliefs, whereas the 'situational' aspect incorporates the fluidity of identities in these youth, that moves continuously between various points on my continuum.

My assertion is that majority of my respondents have a clear picture of the cultural hierarchies that exist in society, and perhaps view being 'hybrid' as simply falling prey to notions of the melting pot theory of multiculturalism. Rather than being directed by this convenient blending of cultures they choose to highlight differences in some aspects of their lives and in others, they choose to fit in. As illustrated earlier in the thesis, with relation to the art of second-generation artist Chris Ofili, he breaks from multiculturalism with a move towards a 'blackness' that is more constructed and contingent, and an approach to ethnicity that is more ambivalent. By deconstructing the notion of hybridity, my sample are similarly able to manipulate their 'otherness' and 'difference' when they feel necessary, and otherwise highlight their sameness, without necessarily amalgamating the two; cultural differentiation is maintained.

Within the conceptual dimension of 'race' and 'ethnicity', most of my interviewees project a desire, and in fact a need to be able to locate themselves. This is generally described in relation to how they are 'racialized' or 'ethnicized' by others - by the majority culture and often, their own particular ethnic groupings, in terms of sameness and difference. Several members of the sample see the notion of 'visible difference' as one of the determining factors of their identity. The concept of 'race' is perceived as immutable, something around which people still create assumptions and form stereotypes. The majority of the interviewees who mention this are of African or African-Caribbean backgrounds, and they generally call themselves 'Black' first, then 'British' or 'English' because 'that is what you see' or that is 'how I look'. There is an inter-play of the social, cultural and biological registers that affect how they define themselves. Donna, for example, seeks to invert this need to acknowledge the racialization of her identity and seeks to call herself 'English' rather than 'Black'. The political statement she makes is: 'do not judge me by how I look, but on the basis of who I am'. Most of the Asian respondents, similarly find it difficult to hail themselves 'British' or 'English', preferring to call themselves 'Indian', 'Asian' or 'Pakistani' - often based on how they are ethnicized. To call oneself 'British' is perceived to have a number of implications, ranging from a general discomfort with the term, seen to represent 'whiteness', colonialism, or simply official terminology which validates one's nationality or passport status. Looks matter within colonial regimes of power stemming from the history of racialization of looks.

More importantly however the term 'black' also carries a political, collective meaning, arising from the struggle for equal rights and recognition, and some respondents exhibit a confidence attached to this notion of 'being black'.

When considering the dichotomous approach to ethnicity, I maintain that my respondents fall within the 'instrumentalist' or 'situational' perspective in contrast to the 'primordial' one. Their ethnic identities are socially defined phenomena with the meanings and boundaries constantly being renegotiated and redefined depending on specific circumstances. When one declares an ethnic identity, however, these declarations embody an ethnic consciousness which if strong lead to the merging of one's personal identification with a communal or collective one. In some senses, there is no real 'end of the innocent notion of the essential black subject' as suggested by Hall (1987) since notions of these essences still continue within society, as manifested amongst my sample. Donna, for example, felt attending a primarily white secondary school had alienated her from her black peers and cultural practices. Her main concern was that she would be treated as 'other', an outsider or more negatively, as a '*coconut*' by her own ethnic group. She therefore, felt it necessary to change schools' and go to a school with a better ethnic mix. By taking this decision, the respondent shows herself to have been affected by beliefs in a black cultural essence; namely, how to be 'black' in order to be accepted by her own community. Paul, similarly, exhibited notions of what it means to be a 'black man', which he uses in relation to the character of Alan in *EastEnders*, who is seen to behave unlike other black



men. Paul also constantly refers to the need for '*keeping it real*' which in his case means keeping it true to the black culture and people. Some black celebrities, like Lenny Henry are '*sell-outs*' because they have '*crossed over*' and appeal to a cross-section of audiences – they are not 'black' enough.

With a number of Asian respondents, there are also clear references as to how one is expected to behave as an Asian. Fellow peers and characters on television are described as being too '*Westernised*'. This concept, used only by the Asian respondents, suggests a clear distinction that they make between the 'West' and a 'Western' lifestyle as opposed to their essential Asian values and beliefs, seen as rooted in morals and respect. Jasmeet frequently uses the binary oppositions of 'them' and 'us' - being '*too westernised*' is regarded as over-stepping the mark and turning one's back on one's heritage and culture. These preconceived notions of what being of a particular ethnic background signifies, shows that these young people of the diaspora find it difficult to diffuse borders and abandon essences in favour of hybridity. In some ways the belief in essences, provide a sense of 'belonging', and are sometimes used strategically, as suggested by Spivak (1990), to give a sense of empowerment.

Based on my preliminary fieldwork discussions, I had assumed that the older, young people in my sample would be more in tune with their parents' generation. The assumption that there would be a greater need and desire for belonging, and hence greater cultural essentialism, amongst the older section of my youth grouping, opposed to those in the younger grouping, was based

around the notion that having passed the rebellious stage of proving one's individuality and of opposing parental influences, this group would now be considering their future. With plans for marriage, and possibly children, I maintained the whole subject of roots and cultural identity would feature heavily in their lives. This has emerged, although some of the younger interviewees also place great importance on their cultural identities, and the significance of roots and cultural continuity. And by contrast, a number of the older generation are quite 'situational' and strategic with their sense of belonging.

Rather than age simply making a difference to attitudes, I have found that differences depend more on their upbringing and their closeness to family, community and the 'homeland'. For example, two of the younger interviewees, Jasmeet and Shirley are surprisingly more militant in their beliefs. Shirley for example, in defining her identity, embodies the subtext of 'home', which is crucial to the concept of diaspora. She refers to living in Britain but it not being her home; reflecting a racialized imagination whereby she is 'in' Britain but not 'of' Britain. Her home is Ghana and this is where she would ultimately like to die. Here the romanticized myth of return is turned into inevitability. Similarly, Jasmeet bases her notions of home around specific geographical territories and specific histories and atrocities that occurred there - the imperialist ruling of India, and the formation of Sikhism, being two particular political dimensions. The notion of a diaspora that both these interviewees articulate is linked to processes of inclusion and exclusion -

of attaining a sense of belonging and of having a clear 'homeland' to which they can attach themselves.

One aspect that appears to have left a deep impression on a number of the interviewees, encouraging them to embrace their roots more closely, is the journey to a country of origin or the homeland – the route to their roots. It seems to give them a real sense of 'belonging' - if not towards a particular country, then towards a diasporic or collective belonging. Majority of the sample feel uncomfortable simply referring to themselves as 'British' outright, and prefer to use descriptions such as 'Asian', 'Indian' or 'Black'. By having made that journey 'home' or to a point of origin as they see it, they feel more able to emphasize their 'Otherness'. Asserting difference is seen to signify respect for one's cultural background and family and a pride in one's roots.

Overall, the main finding to emerge from this analysis of diasporic youth identities is the malleability of identity, which is subject to change and reinterpretation; juxtaposed alongside more clearly defined ethnic and cultural boundaries which each individual puts in place, as suggested by Barth (1969). Some individuals make use of the multiplicity of subject positions and potential identities available to them, whereas others, in the face of uncertainties, retreat to the old securities of traditional allegiances and romanticize a past age (Rutherford 1990:24; Parekh 1995). I believe it is possible to overestimate the extent to which individuals are able to pick and choose the elements out of which to construct their identities (Jacobson 1998).



My interviewees, along with many other young people often feel pressured into certain definitions of identity, whether based on race, religion or cultural expectations that are imposed on them by fellow members of the groups they belong to, or outsiders. This is what gives rise to the 'situational' aspect of 'belonging' that governs these youth identities – circumstance-led constructions of identity that state 'who I am' depends on 'where I am' and 'with whom'.

When constructing and maintaining boundaries, this younger generation move the markers to allow them to encompass wider social dimensions. These may not always meet the approval of the first generation, namely, in terms of certain friendships, social activities and even inter-caste, inter-faith and inter-racial marriage or relationships. What I would like to emphasize, however, is that no matter how permeable the boundaries may appear to have become, this group of second and third generation youth are still concerned about 'belonging' to their respective ethnic groups and having a distinct cultural dimension to their identities. The specificity of cultural belonging may be slightly watered down, in that the first generation placed a great deal of importance on caste and religion along with country of origin, whereas nowadays many simply refer to themselves as 'Asian'. In part, this can be attributed to the growing acceptance of ethnic minority youth culture. For example, the recent popularity of Asian culture in terms of fashion, music, films, radio and television has made it more desirable to be part of the Asian

diaspora. There are clear indications, however, that most young people simply feel the need to maintain roots and a cultural continuity.

The struggle of being 'between two cultures' is not easily identifiable amongst my interviewees. They appear able to respect their parents and their culture as well as merge aspects of the wider British culture. In some situations, they feel able to 'commodify their Otherness' and as hooks suggests, able 'to use their ethnicity to spice up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture' (1992: 21). Inclusion and exclusion greatly contribute to the ethnic identities and allegiances that these youth formulate, in terms of being both 'situational' and 'situated'. Ultimately what needs to be acknowledged is that however much second and third generation youth may be constructed as 'outsiders' or 'different', they now have the ability to contest these psychological and geographical spaces as British people or as 'insiders'. This is the fundamental generational change, developed as a result of having the options of being British and Asian, or British and black, unlike with the parent generation. Second and third generation youth of the diaspora exhibit 'competences' that allow them to adapt flexibly to other cultures and manoeuvre in and between particular cultures (Hannerz 1990), to be 'situational' or 'situated'.

## **PART III**

## **CONCLUSION**



## **Chapter 6**

### **CONCLUSION**

My aim in Chapter Six is twofold: to summarise the findings of this thesis and my conceptualisation of 'situational belonging,' and to evaluate the conclusions for future directions. This research has been based on a diverse, heterogeneous sample of second and third generations of ethnic minority backgrounds, precisely because of the dearth of such empirical research, which examine cross sections of ethnicities within one study. Many deal separately, either with African-Caribbean or Asian youth, focusing either on race or ethnicity, youth identities or television but rarely combined in one unified piece of qualitative research and this is where my research contribution offers a different perspective.

In addition to the multi-ethnic backgrounds, I have also sub-divided the category of youth to include a spectrum of age groups within my sample. With a continuum of positions in mind, ranging from essentialist to anti-essentialist and many intersecting hybrid combinations, I had assumed older

respondents would be more clearly plotted on one side and the younger respondents on the other. What became apparent, however, is that it is almost impossible to place any of the interviewees in one particular place on the continuum. The conviction of a distinct continuum and positionings for specific age groups, was abandoned in favour of a 'situationalism', that allows movement according to context. One aspect of my hypothesis that held, however, was the cyclical process, which suggested that with time one feels the need to create a sense of belonging and embrace aspects of one's roots. This need for 'belonging' coupled with the 'situational' nature of my young sample's identities, has given rise to my concept of 'situational belonging'.

In order to focus more closely on ethnic diversity and generation and a mixed group in terms of gender, I deliberately chose not focus on class in any great depth. The focus of my sample, however, reflects young, middle class ethnic minorities living in cosmopolitan London, who may be more confident about their position in society. My findings, therefore, coincidentally, pertain to a particular class of ethnic minority young people, who by virtue of their education and upbringing are able to express certain opinions and to attain varying degrees of social mobility. When these young people embrace their ethnicized roots, they may have greater choice. By virtue of living in a city that embraces cultural plurality, they possess greater cultural competences and ethnic options. This allows them more freedom to counter and negotiate imposed and unwanted images and identities. I feel their common

background in terms of class has allowed me to focus on the other social divisions and variables more fully. I, therefore, feel that my contribution, first and foremost, needs to be recognised in terms of ethnic diversity among young people.

## OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

Throughout the thesis I have explored and questioned the concepts of hybridity, essentialism and assimilation in order to demonstrate an alternative perspective to understanding second and third generation identities. Within this conclusion, I would like to sum up the status of 'situational belonging' for diasporic young people living in Britain.

Based on my interview data, I have concluded that my interviewees experience their identities on a number of levels; in other words, they exhibit fluid and dynamic negotiations of identity. From my findings, I purport that being hybrid or an amalgam of two or more cultures is less important than being able to position oneself in accordance with the situation or context. In other words, hybridity is less recognised than 'situationalism' or contingency in particular contexts. That is not to say that unconscious, organic hybridity is not part of the process, since over the decades, the second and third generations have incorporated Britishness into their identities, by virtue of



being born and raised in Britain. They have however, on the basis of both their own experiences and those of their parents, chosen to construct markers or boundaries that help maintain cultural differentiation. Crucial to their identity is the need to create or maintain a sense of belonging.

My young interviewees suggest there has been a rupture in the predominance of multiculturalism. Born and raised in Britain, they have a clear knowledge of structural constraints that exist in the wider society and within their own communities but, unlike previous generations, they exhibit a defiance or 'new confidence', arising from their status as young and British as well as 'Other'. These multiple identities, however, are not in any way fixed, but fluid and contingent, changing according to situations that these young people find themselves in and through adopting identities that cannot be easily classified. The interviews accentuate competences that are put to use in dealing with matters of identity, roots and belonging.

The identity crisis or being 'between two cultures' is not in evidence. By contrast, what exists is the ability to negotiate and position oneself according to the 'situation', namely, 'British', in certain circumstances, 'Indian' in others, 'Muslim' in others. There is an understanding of the need to reinterpret and reinvent oneself. However, alongside this is the belief that aspects of their identity need to be preserved, for example, in terms of religion, certain traditions and cultural practices. A number of my interviewees emphasize the

need for boundaries in certain areas of their lives, which fix or 'situate' aspects of their belonging.

I began my study with the assumption that the focus would primarily be upon individual identities but found that the notion of the individual self as agent, able to fully take charge of identity formation, is not tenable. The external, structural constraints that govern the constructions of identity, from socialization within the home, to the existence of racialization and ethnicization within the dominant culture, have become evident. My interviewees display a clear knowledge of how they are perceived, and the preconceptions that often govern how they are judged. They are politicized by this knowledge and this is what often governs their strategic positionings. They are conditioned by others' perceptions of their 'Otherness' and difference and this in turn affects the narratives they construct for themselves.

My interviewees do not recognise the notion of hybridity or hyphenated identities as such. Few describe themselves as 'Black British' or 'Asian British', instead often preferring to accentuate their cultural or ethnic origin. The way they define themselves is more often symptomatic of how they are perceived by others, in other words, how they are 'racialized' or 'ethnicized'. For example, the majority of my African and African Caribbean respondents, refer to themselves, first and foremost as 'being black' which is based on others' perceptions of them, and secondly, on being part of a collectivity, which is often socially and politically motivated. The Asian respondents refer to ethnic

differences or 'ethnicity' as distinguishing them from the white British population. These young people, although more educated and cosmopolitan than some ethnic minority youngsters, still find it difficult to move beyond the discourses of race and racism and 'beyond skin' in Sawhney's expression, and this in part has given rise to the need for skilled negotiations, when constructing identities.

'Situational belonging' is marked by the skill and dexterity with which my sample is able to negotiate their sense of belonging. They exhibit and demonstrate a new confidence which some would call a politically motivated defiance that makes them skilled negotiators. They demonstrate fluidity alongside fixity, assimilation alongside essentialism, sameness alongside difference, and most pertinently, a cultural insiderism alongside an outsiderism. As one respondent stated, *'it always depends on who, or what or why'*, or as another put it *'it's quite important that cultures integrate, but at the same time I think it is nice they stick together....because if everyone just mish-mashed together for the rest of time, everything would get a bit lost'*.

This illustrates multiple juxtapositions rather than binary oppositions as an aspect of situational belonging. By virtue of being British, they are insiders and yet in order to maintain cultural distinctions and what they perceive to be cultural authenticity, they need to place themselves outside the mainstream culture. Unlike the case of hybridity, there is rarely a total blurring of boundaries. In one area or other there is always a wish to emphasize



distinctiveness and to assert differences, in order to create a sense of belonging.

My choice of title for this thesis 'Beyond Skin' encapsulated my need to interrogate and problematize the notion that skin colour and visible differences no longer affect the formation of ethnic minority identities. For a renowned musician such as Nitin Sawhney, his circumstances may allow him the freedom to assert that he is capable of being 'beyond politics, nationality, religion and beyond skin', and that he is the only person who defines his identity and history. This utopian individualism is difficult to associate with second and third generation youth in general. On the basis of my research findings, there still exists an aspirational tension between racialization, Britishness and belonging. I would argue against too easy an embrace of being 'beyond skin' or at that point in history where we can talk emphatically about being 'beyond race' or collective identities.

Being perceived as different by the dominant culture and having to deal with the wider society's preconceptions, plays a significant role in minority ethnic communities' sense of being and self-definition. Maintaining ethnic and religious differences, as a result, have always been considered vital for self-understanding within such communities, in particular for older generations, who often have real memories of a home outside of Britain, where they may have lived or at least, visited. Multiculturalism has over the years also played a role in creating clear divisions, by not treating all the component cultures of

British society as equal. What my findings indicate is that there is now a need to change from simple integration and assimilation towards the acceptance of cultural pluralism, which involves opening up spaces for celebrating diversity.

I suggest that marginalization, arising in part from multiculturalism, has required ethnic minorities to carve out their own particular place and space in British society. This need for a sense of belonging is voiced by some of my interviewees in an almost defensive way, whereby they are as 'English' or 'British', as the next person, but also have roots that come from elsewhere. Many, by virtue of being 'Othered', prefer to describe themselves as 'Other' and highlight the differences that go with being 'Indian', 'Pakistani' or 'Nigerian'; they become strategically essentialist. They do not want fragmented or hybrid identities but similarly do not want a fixed identity. What they embrace are multiple affiliations, in accordance with the situation within which they find themselves. There is no one definitive narrative that these young diasporics embrace, but a multiplicity of belongings, dependent on the situations within which they find themselves. The importance of being able to negotiate the differences between 'their' culture and the host culture in order to make progress in society is realized, and this is where being 'situational' comes into play.

The majority of my respondents' identities have in some way been influenced by the narratives of the past. Hearing stories about the homeland from

parents and family, interactions within their relevant communities and like-minded friends and trips back to the homeland keep links with what are perceived as roots alive. For several respondents the desire to retain a cultural identity is rooted in a homeland, seen to have specific cultural practices and traditions. For many a return to the homeland or the route back to their roots has left a deep impression on their identities. It becomes the turning point in stabilizing their identities. Stories they have heard about the homeland and their extended families, are turned into a reality; a reality of practice in their daily lives in Britain. Contrary to the belief that each new generation waters down their cultural consciousness, I have found that second and third generations are very much in tune with their cultural past.

Rather than feeling essentialized by a narrative constructed by the dominant culture that sees them primarily in terms of being a 'second generation', I maintain that these young people embrace the term to construct their own narratives. Many place a great deal of importance around the experiences of the first generation, respect for family and their cultural roots, and consequently, on their status of being second or third generation. From this, I would conclude that these young people seek to be individual as well as part of a collective community in society. 'Who am I' and 'what are my origins' are questions that are regularly posed for these diasporics, and it is largely around this quest for identity and belonging that skilled negotiation is carried out.



From my interviewees, I have been able to conclude that changes do occur in the life course at different points within the life category. Although there is a constant negotiation of identity dependent on the situations and contexts one finds oneself in, there is a point at which identity moves towards fixedness, in terms of ethnic roots and cultural identity. This confirms my hypothesis that a cyclical process occurs, moving identity from collective belonging in the family unit and community, towards individualism in one's early youth, and then back towards the need to embrace one's roots and a sense of belonging in later youth. In other words, there is no fixed identity as such but an emerging cycle, affected by age, experience and the context.

Marriage is one of the predominant areas that I would highlight as creating essentialist positionings within these diasporic youth. It is seen as the continuation of a link between the past, present and future. Being able to pass on a cultural inheritance is seen to be of great importance to a number of the interviewees; the ultimate way to maintain one's cultural roots and traditions. Identities are thought of in terms of absolutes; not open to being syncretized or becoming chronically impure cultural forms. For many this notion or even illusion of a cultural essence derived from same-culture marriages, provides continuity in their lives.

Further intricacies of my interviewees' identities are highlighted through discussions of the representation and perceptions of ethnic minorities on television. What they want to see is cultural pluralism that allows diversity

without the hierarchy of the dominant culture over the minority or 'foreign' cultures. Harsh criticisms of the black and Asian characters on screen were indicative of the lack of images in the first place, and the resulting additional pressures that fall on the few to give positive representations. Ethnic minority actors are in other words, still made to carry the burden of representation. For example, several interviewees welcomed the unexpected popularity of the Asian comedy programme, *Goodness Gracious Me*, as a celebration of 'difference'. Others, however, were more sceptical of the mainstream interest in 'their' culture, and found it somewhat unnerving and exploitative. What exists is a juxtaposition of a sense of pride alongside a wariness of how well the Asian comedy is being received by a mainstream audience and how, if misunderstood, could give rise to misrepresentation and stereotyping.

My respondents believe that portrayals of cultural differences or 'cultural authenticity' in Black and Asian characters will greatly improve ethnic minority representations on television. What this means is that they want to be shown as 'different', they do not want to be seen as a 'problem' or as 'exotica' but simply as another acceptable dimension of British society. For example, it is suggested that showing characters in different clothes, portraying a variety of lifestyles, cultural practices and religions needs to be made more familiar and acceptable within British society in order for ethnic minorities to be fully accepted in society. As some of my Asian respondents suggest, ethnic minorities in soaps need to be seen to reflect their own cultural practices and not to simply fit in. As one African-Caribbean respondent aptly

states - it is all about the characters *'keeping it real'* or reflecting what are perceived as authentic cultural behaviour and practices. Unlike with multiculturalism however, diversity needs to be recognized and accommodated without any notions of fixity or stereotyping attached to them; a recognition that these differences make up Britain as a whole. My respondents want to belong, with their differences celebrated alongside their sameness, as part of British life and their lives. They believe we need to move beyond the philosophy of multiculturalism, without notions of minority and majority cultures and towards a more accepting pluralism.

I would suggest, that my sample of young people are less concerned with notions of 'being' and 'becoming' and more interested in 'belonging'; a dynamic belonging with fixedness on some levels and a fluidity on others. There is fluidity and contingency within their ethnic identities that manifests itself in a number of ways, including definitions of boundaries, which prevent them from forgetting their origin and roots and acts as a way of commemorating the past. A great deal of significance is attached to their membership of an ethnic group. Narratives, in particular the narrative of location, provide a way of positioning themselves, structured more in terms of denial, through a rejection of 'what one is not', rather than based upon 'what one is'; for example, not 'British' but 'Black', not 'Black' but 'Ghanaian', not 'Pakistani' but 'Muslim'.



I would, on the basis of this research have to conclude, that as long as the racialization and ethnicization of identities continues, distinctions will be drawn between dominant and minority cultures. More significantly, however, I would maintain that these differences may continue because young people of the diaspora will choose to keep them alive, by embracing their cultural differences and roots. 'Race' and 'ethnicity' are often subverted or inverted in order to provide cultural capital, a sense of empowerment or a sense of belonging to a community or collective within which they feel pride.

Identities are created through the reclamation of aspects of history that bear relevance to a person's individual and collective experience and as such, they are never static and always in a process of creation and transformation.

Identity is therefore, dependent on endless re-positioning based on the contingent and context. Many of the interviewees regard Britain as a place where they are born and live and yet their homeland is elsewhere; one home based in present day reality and another located across oceans in a distant land, in some cases, more of a romanticised myth. In contrast to the past notion of being 'between cultures', these young people are of two or more cultures. They are negotiators who are able to commodify their otherness, while also asserting their sameness.

Unlike the first generation, the newer generations have greater choices. With every choice there is movement, change and constant re-definition, but alongside this fluidity, there is maintenance of boundaries, which provide

cultural preservation. Change and continuity exist side by side in 'situational belonging', which is a 'belonging' very much dependent on contexts or situations, at particular junctures in the life course. On the other hand, 'situated belonging' is more stabilising and helps define boundaries, and can be inflected by more essentialist thinking. This both supports and builds on my assumption of the cyclical process involved in second and third generation identity formations. My interviewees are not dislocated peoples but trans-located young people, who travel across cultural-border crossings and are able to transcend the dichotomies of home and host. They are skilled in the processes of cultural maintenance and negotiation, resistance and adaptation.

This research has identified the contestation that takes place in the construction of identities in young people of the African, Caribbean and Asian diasporas. An understanding of the future of multi-ethnic Britain emerges, pointing towards the creation of new ethnicities and new ways of dealing with racist ideologies that still remain in sectors of the dominant society.

## **FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

Identity and questions surrounding 'Britishness' and belonging are pressing issues in contemporary Britain. There is no longer one clear definition of what

it means to be 'British' as reflected in my sample of second and third generations. With migration the population is in flux, experiencing mobility and changes in all sectors of society. The first generation of ethnic minorities to this country who had to overcome the stigma and prejudices of their beginnings in Britain, are now followed by later generations, who are more skilled at negotiating the best identities for themselves. They may have greater cultural capital, because they are born and raised in Britain, and feel they belong to another cultural heritage. They can use this to their advantage when necessary, according to situations they find themselves in. Choosing to belong or not, or to commodify on their Otherness. They are both cultural insiders or outsiders, according to the context.

My research, which is small-scale and more specific in terms of age and ultimately in terms of class, has highlighted the need for more such work, with even more emphasis on the heterogeneity of ethnic minorities in Britain. Whereas I have largely focused on the more affluent and higher achieving section of second and third generation young people, there may be a different outcome to research conducted among lower socio-economic status young people and the areas of dissent in their lives. The spectrum of new research could also address aspects of other generations, considering the old and very young, and different classes and religions. Focusing on diversity on a much larger scale could also allow the incorporation of questionnaires in the initial stages, followed up by similar in-depth interviews, thus providing greater background information on the interviewees.



Since I began my research, it also needs to be acknowledged that the social and political climate within Britain has changed quite dramatically. For example, the media hysteria about asylum seekers and refugees, race riots in Bradford and other North West English towns and cities and the election of BNP councillors are just some of the issues that have raised further questions about the validity of multiculturalism and the need for changes in policy towards assimilation. Similarly, television which in some ways acts as a barometer of change, appears to have moved away from policies of targeted and niche programming towards merging ethnic minorities into the mainstream with greater ease, as evidenced in programmes such as *The Kumars at No. 42*. An interesting follow-up to my research on television and representation of ethnic minorities on the screen would be to see how important this is for the next generations. Would they in any way feel the need for specific programming aimed at ethnic minorities? A key question perhaps would be how significant is mainstream television likely to be as a popular culture medium in future decades?

In 21<sup>st</sup> century, multi-ethnic Britain, there is even more scope for studying new cultural hybridities and ethnicities. The dynamics of 'situational belonging' need further exploration in relation to the whole notion of 'Britishness', including how it is implicated in other national identities which make up the United Kingdom, or in relation to whiteness. What also needs consideration is its validity amongst future generations, if concepts like

hybridity, Otherness and belonging become less relevant through the embracing of cultural plurality.

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